CALL OF CTHULHU

Alone Against
THE STATIC

A SOLO 1990s ADVENTURE BEYOND SIGNAL RANGE

B. W. Holland

CHAOSIUM INC.

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To Mike Mason for giving me the go-ahead, James Coquillat for his diligent editing, and to whatever it was by my bedroom window all those nights as I laid awake, wondering what was walking through the woods outside.

Clear Credit
Alone Against the Static was written by B. W. Holland, with editorial and development by James Coquillat and Mike Mason.

This supplement is best used with the *Call of Cthulhu* (7th Edition) roleplaying game, available separately.

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FOREWORD

I used to joke that I grew up in the woods from *The Blair Witch Project*.

Our family home was locked in by state forest for two kilometers in every direction. Growing up in a place where the darkness was thick, and the sounds beyond the walls of our house were often unidentifiable, I came to appreciate a level of horror that manifests in the wild places of the world that—to me—feels absent in cities populated by the human throng. I learned to savor the feeling of protection while inside a home in such locations, however false that safety actually was. It's a sensation of the walls of wood and mudbrick somehow keeping the cold and the darkness at bay, even if the sound of something raking gently across your bedroom window was… commonplace.

Alone Against the Static is my attempt to view the quiet wild through the lens of the Cthulhu Mythos. I wanted to give players a strong sense of place and isolation. Setting the scenario in the 1990s allowed me to showcase how *Call of Cthulhu* can flourish in all settings—the modern age opens new avenues of horror not available in the 1920s, such as creepy video tapes of unknown origin.

It is my hope that both new and returning *Call of Cthulhu* players discover an aspect of horror that they may not have encountered before, and I especially hope they find inspiration with which to weave their own tales of Mythos horror at the gaming table.

—B. W. Holland, Melbourne, 2022

INTRODUCTION

Alone Against the Static is a *Call of Cthulhu* scenario designed to be played by a single person, where you are both the Keeper and player. You take on the role of either Alex or Charlie—a young couple who are vacationing at a secluded forest cabin in South Dakota's Black Hills. The collapse of their relationship, and a creeping horror growing in the woods around them, are the central focus of the adventure. Chaosium recommends this book for mature players.

The adventure is set during the 1990s; unfortunately for you, it takes place far out of signal range. Don't rely on modern conveniences to protect you from danger. Deadly forces to whom a few decades mean nothing are lurking in the shadowy woods around you.

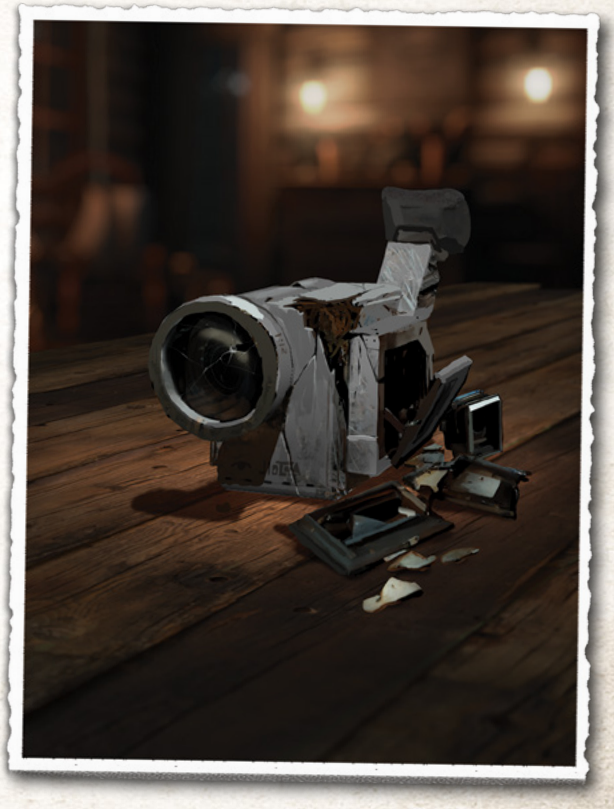
You can attempt this adventure as many times as you like. Each playthrough allows you to select different choices or even a different character. With every new path you take, you'll discover more secrets hidden away among the pines. Make good use of the tools at your disposal if you hope to survive this very unfortunate vacation.

PREPARING TO START

1. Make sure you have a copy of the *Call of Cthulhu: Keeper Rulebook* or the *Call of Cthulhu Starter Set* at hand.
2. Copy or print out both **Alex's** and **Charlie's** investigator sheets (page 102). Select which of them you'd like to play and put the other sheet to the side.
3. Read the **Getting Started** section (page 6).
4. Once that's done, you are ready to take on the challenges of **Alone Against the Static** (starting on page 8). Don't worry, that strange sound was probably just the wind.

CONTENT WARNING

Alone Against the Static is a horror scenario and explores themes of grief, isolation, relationships, and heartbreak, and is recommended for mature players.



The Shattered Camera

GETTING STARTED

You'll need a pencil, scratch paper, dice, and the *Call of Cthulhu: Keeper Rulebook* or the *Call of Cthulhu Starter Set*.

Don't read this book through from beginning to end! Each entry is numbered, and at its end you'll find instructions for where to go and what to read next. Usually, you will be asked to choose an action from between two or more options, and then turn to a corresponding entry based on your decision. Sometimes, you'll see additional instructions, like attempting a skill roll. When this happens, follow the instructions as written.

Before you begin, you must first select either Alex or Charlie. You can find their investigator sheets on pages 102 and 104. Your story will be different depending on which character you choose. While both Alex and Charlie may encounter the same obstacles, they each have a range of different skills and characteristics, making every playthrough unique. The choices you make as you play are not always concerned with what your character is doing but may be to decide how your character is feeling, which can have a bearing on how things progress.

THE LOG SHEET

Alone Against the Static uses a log sheet (page 98) to help record the choices you've made during your playthrough. As you progress through the adventure, some entries instruct you to check/tick a specific box on the log sheet. Some entries provide you with extra options depending on which boxes on the log sheet are already checked/ticked. Some entries may even block you from certain choices and force you to turn to a particular entry, all based on what prerequisites you've fulfilled.

You should always start any playthrough with a blank log sheet. If you restart your adventure, make sure to erase all the checked boxes.

MAKING A ROLL

At various points throughout this adventure, you may be asked to make skill or characteristic rolls. These rolls are made as per normal for *Call of Cthulhu*, using either Charlie's or Alex's investigator sheet.

Some *Call of Cthulhu* mechanics have been simplified to streamline gameplay. In combat for example, only the result of your combat rolls factor into deciding an outcome. Other mechanics, like chases, bouts of madness, and more, have been similarly simplified. Any of these modifications to standard mechanics, as well as any additional factors like bonus or penalty dice, are clearly stated alongside the regular instructions in each entry.

PUSHING ROLLS & SPENDING LUCK

If you fail a roll, you may be able to either spend **Luck** or **Push the Roll** to succeed—the entry text advises you if a pushed roll is possible. If a roll is eligible to be pushed, then when you are asked to make it, you will also be invited to reattempt a failure at the risk of additional penalties.

If you don't want to push a roll, you can also use Luck as per the optional Luck rules in the *Call of Cthulhu: Keeper Rulebook*. This rule allows you to spend your Luck points to alter the result of skill or characteristic rolls. You may alter a roll on a 1-for-1 basis. For example, to adjust a roll of 49 to make the result equal to your skill of 45, you would spend 4 points of Luck, and deduct that amount from your current Luck total. You cannot spend Luck points to alter Damage, Luck, or Sanity rolls, or rolls to determine the amount of Sanity points lost. Additionally, you cannot spend Luck on a pushed roll. You may use Luck spending in this manner whenever you desire during the adventure—but be aware that your Luck can run out!

DYING & GOING INSANE

Over the course of the scenario, some choices can result in a loss of either **Hit Points** or **Sanity**. Track these values carefully and remember the following:

- If you ever reach zero hit points, you fall unconscious, become defenseless, and will die. Mark down the entry number you're in, then go to **324**.
- If you ever lose half or more of your health in a single instance of damage, you receive a major wound. Mark down the entry number you're in, then go to **325**.
- If you are ever reduced to **zero Sanity**, you go permanently insane. Mark down the passage you're in, then go to **334**.
- If you ever lose more than one fifth of your total Sanity in a single day, you go indefinitely insane. Mark down the entry you're in, then go to **328.** *Charlie's Sanity begins at 60, which means one-fifth of their total Sanity is 12. Alex's Sanity begins at 50, which means one-fifth of their total Sanity is 10. These values may change throughout the adventure due to lesser Sanity losses.*
- If you ever lose more than **5 Sanity** points in a single instance, you trigger a bout of madness. Mark down the entry you're in, then go to **329**.

It is possible to trigger several of the above conditions simultaneously. If this occurs, resolve the conflicts in the following order:

- Prioritize resolving damage before Sanity.
- Prioritize reaching zero hit points over resolving a major wound (i.e., go to **324** not **325**).
- Prioritize reaching zero Sanity first, which basically cancels out indefinite insanity and/or a bout of madness (i.e., go to **334** not **328** or **329).**

A NOTE ABOUT THE ENTRIES

The entries are numbered consecutively from 1 to 371.

Note: keep a record of the entry numbers you go to, as you may have to backtrack at certain times—knowing which entries you have followed is important.

All entries present information in the same way:

- The entry number is written in large bold numerals.
- Details describe the scene or briefly comment on a situation.
- After that, the entry might instruct you to go to a certain entry, ask you to choose an action, or to roll a die, which have different outcomes.
- The parenthesized number or numbers at the end of each entry are "trace numbers," showing the entries from which you may have come from to have arrived at the present entry (allowing you to backtrack if necessary).
- Occasionally, you may encounter the phrase "THE END." This signifies that your investigator is doomed and the adventure is over. Sometimes, it means you have won, of course. But not very often. If you failed in this attempt, reset your log sheet, and try again.

ALONE AGAINST THE STATIC

START

Somewhere in the forgotten wilds, where pine needles carpet the forest floor, *something* stirs.

Wind whips around the Black Hills, to places where bears, rabbits, and birds never visit. The trees of the surrounding forest shiver. Beneath the moist earth, *something* wakes.

Shifting from beneath the soil, it erupts in silence from the ground. Its emergence reverberates throughout the wild. Far off, a wolf howls in mourning for what will soon pass.

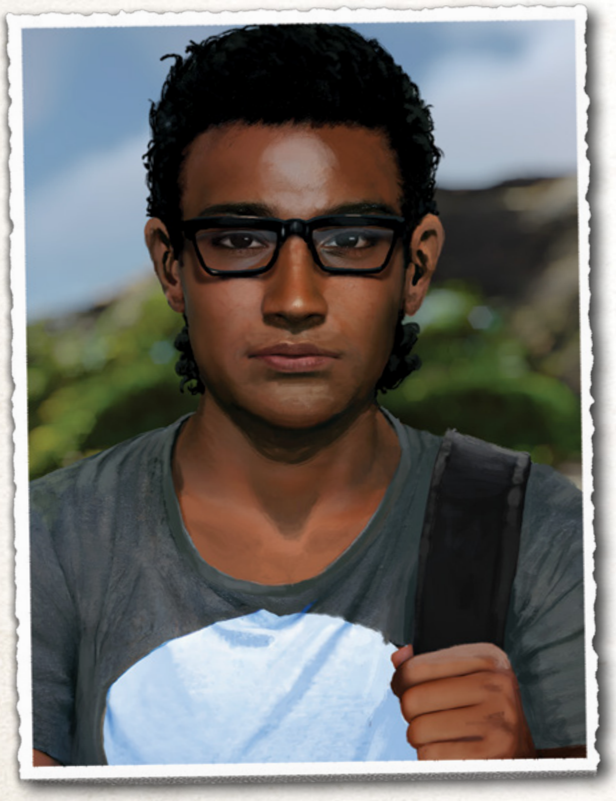
It pulls itself from the darkness and breathes.

It blinks.

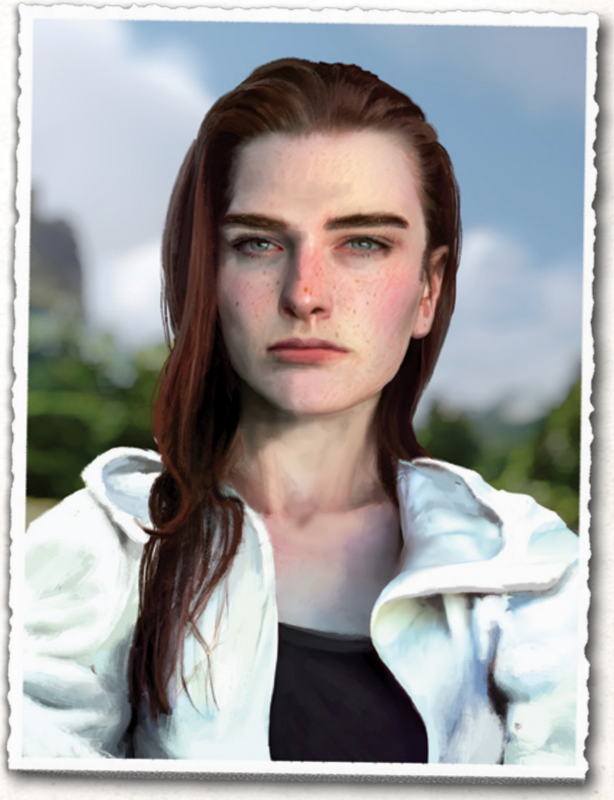
Take your chosen investigator's sheet. Roll 3D6 and multiply the result by 5 to determine their ***Luck*** *score and write the result down.*

To begin your adventure as Alex, go to ***1****.*

To begin your adventure as Charlie, go to ***2****.*



Charlie



Alex

1

"*Dammit!*" Charlie growls, struggling to fold an impractically large map over your car's steering wheel and avoid veering offroad into a tree at the same time.

"Can you just let me hold the map?" you ask.

"No. I can do this just fine," Charlie says, then slams on the brakes to round another tight bend.

It is late afternoon on a rural backroad deep within the Black Hills of South Dakota. The sun is high, but the air is cold. You've seen nothing but pine trees and two narrow winding lanes for over an hour. Your car's radio is getting weaker. It splutters out a Neil Diamond song laced with static.

*Check/tick **Alex** on the log sheet.*
*To keep offering help, go to **7**.*
*To change the radio station instead, go to **3**.*

(Start)

2

"Buzz…," Alex mutters absent-mindedly, opening and closing the car's electric window for the tenth time in two minutes. You grit your teeth. You only just got back on the road after your truck stop break, and Alex has already fiddled with every button within reach. You're left to steer the car and navigate using a ridiculously oversized map. Alex gets bored of the window, sighs, then turns to you. *"Can you just let me hold the map?"*

"No. I can do this just fine," you reply. The two of you already missed one turnoff this trip because Alex lost track of your route. It's better for you to just take care of everything.

It is late afternoon on a rural backroad deep within the Black Hills. The sun is high, but the air is cold. Tall pine trees and rolling valleys stretch as far as you can see in every direction. Crisp autumn air drifts in through Alex's open window. Then, you hear an electronic buzz for a moment. Suddenly it appears again. On and off. On and off. You bite your tongue and keep silent. Alex turns on the radio. You hear a harsh screech of static as they start scanning through different frequencies. This is all pointless. You're way out of signal range. The only song you can pick up is a heavily distorted Neil Diamond single.

*To ask Alex to stop, go to **83**.*
*To just ignore the sound, go to **96**.*

(Start)

3

You reach forward and turn the dial. The speakers vomit static while you scan for a signal.

"*Please*," Charlie barks, and turns the radio off. *"I can't think with all that noise."*

You raise your hands defensively. *"Sorry,"* you say, but Charlie ignores you. You stare at them for a few seconds, then sigh and turn to stare out the window. You watch the muddy green blur of passing trees for several minutes.

"Finally," Charlie says. They jab a finger down at the still tangled map. *"It's the next left."*

You peer ahead and spot a tiny unpaved road cutting deeper into the forest. Charlie pulls onto it and the two of you weave through the trees in silence.

Make a ***Psychology*** *roll to gauge how Charlie is feeling:*

- *If you succeed the roll, go to* ***4****.*
- *If you fail the roll, go to* ***8****.*

(1)

4

Charlie seems agitated. It's been over three hours in the car, so that's understandable. You reach over, put a hand on their leg, and squeeze. You see them smile just a little in response.

"Not far now," Charlie says.

"Good. I can't wait to stretch my legs."

You continue deeper into the forest. The little road you're on winds erratically, dipping up and down as it dodges between hills. The sky gets lost in the branches of pine trees. As the evening shadows lengthen, you feel cold seeping in from outside.

Go to ***5****.*

(3, 7)

5

After a few minutes, a few more turns, and a few miles' travel deeper into the forest, the sun sets. Your car's headlights cut into the darkness, revealing the road ahead just a few feet at a time. Eventually, the lights drift over the front of a cabin, reflecting off two windows on either side of a front door, which seem to stare back at you, ominously.

The car stops and the headlights shut off. *"Finally,"* you sigh, and step out onto the gravel driveway. As you walk around to the trunk to help with the suitcases, the cold night air seizes around you like a vice.

"Are you hungry?" Charlie asks, while you try to keep from shivering.

Make a ***CON*** *roll; if you fail, check/tick* ***Touched by Cold*** *on the log sheet.*

To say you are hungry, go to ***6****.*

To say you aren't hungry, go to ***12****.*

(4, 8)

6

You nod. *"Sure. Hamburgers?"*

"Hamburgers it is."

You take a brown grocery bag from the car's trunk, grab your suitcase, and walk to the cabin door. Charlie opens it up and steps inside. You follow, closing the door behind you to keep the chill out.

Go to ***11****.*

(5)

7

"We're off of I-90, remember?" you say.

After a few moments of sulking, Charlie mutters a response, *"I remember."*

You reach over. *"Here, lemme help with tha–"*

"No!" Charlie yanks the map away. *"Alex, just let me, okay?"*

You put your hands up defensively and roll your eyes. Charlie drives on determinedly for a few more minutes before spotting a tiny unpaved road cutting deeper into the forest. Charlie pulls onto it, and the two of you weave through the trees in silence.

Make a ***Psychology*** *roll to gauge how Charlie is feeling:*

- *If you succeed the roll, go to* ***4****.*
- *If you fail the roll, go to* ***8****.*

(1)

8

Charlie's sulking. This vacation is turning out exactly like you thought it would. Charlie always insists on driving, gets lost, and then refuses to ask for help. The weekend is shaping up to be a nightmare.

"Anyways," Charlie says, *"it's not far now."*

Charlie drives deeper into the forest. The little road you're on winds erratically, dipping up and down as it weaves between hills. Above you, thick gray clouds obscure the sunlight. Soon, the sky gets lost in the branches of pine trees. You feel the cold seeping in from outside.

Go to ***5****.*

(3, 7)

9

You land a solid blow, right against the monster's face. The face it stole from your partner. Your strike splits the flesh, and it rips away into nothingness. The creature itself is completely unharmed. How could you possibly hurt it? It is an erupting mutating beast. But, in the one moment you strike it, you take back some measure of control. You rip away your partner's face from it. That simple gesture is enough to make your heart surge with righteous victory. This thing can't take everything from you.

You don't hold the beast back for long. It grabs at you with a tentacle that comes whipping at your side. As the tentacles boil and writhe before you, an alien voice resonates in the forest around you.

"This is your last chance. Accept the Child and be born anew, or reject it, and suffer."

To accept, go to ***27****.*

To refuse, go to ***134****.*

If ***Temporal Steel*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, and* ***Knife to a Gun Fight*** *is not checked/ticked on the log sheet, go to* ***363****.*

(355)

10

No. No! You race for the edge of the clearing. You can make it out if you're fast enough! You hear the warped sound of your partner's voice calling after you but don't turn to look back. Then, you hear heavy slamming footsteps approaching fast. You can't help but look back for a moment. You see that your partner's body has warped and deformed. Their skin has split, and horrid dark branches burst from their flesh. Propelled by those disgusting long tendrils, they surge forward toward you. You turn back and race for the tree line. If you can just get there and break free, you can leave all this behind you!

Make a ***DEX*** *roll:*
If you succeed, go to ***360****.*
If you fail, go to ***359****.*

(280, 351)

11

The cabin isn't very big; it's just one central room with a double bed, a chest of drawers, and a corner set up to serve as a kitchen. There's no microwave; both the oven and stove use gas. You see two doors: one goes to the rear of the cabin while another leads to a small bathroom. You just know it's going to be freezing in there.

On the wall opposite the bed is a TV and VCR unit sitting on top of a cupboard. The whole cabin is lit by muted yellow bulbs. It's not dark but it's not quite light either.

"I'll be in the john," Charlie says, then steps inside the small bathroom and shuts the door. You are left alone.

You put your suitcase on the bed, take out a few essentials, then move to the kitchen and unpack your groceries. There is a gas fridge and icebox that, judging by the steady and not-at-all-soft hum emanating from it, was installed sometime in the 1970s.

To get started on dinner, go to ***13****.*
To wait for Charlie, go to ***16****.*

(6, 12)

12

"Not especially," you say.

"All right, let's eat soon though. I'm starved."

You take a brown grocery bag from the car's trunk, grab your suitcase, and walk to the cabin door. Charlie opens it up and steps inside. You follow, closing the door behind you to keep the chill out.

Go to ***11****.*

(5)

13

You unpack ingredients for hamburgers. You find matches in a drawer, hold a lit one to the stove's gas burner, and turn the dial. Nothing happens.

"Damn thing." You ignore the front-left burner and use the front-right instead. It lights up super quick.

You've got patties frying and are chopping tomatoes when you hear the toilet flush. Charlie emerges from the bathroom soon after, sighing contentedly.

"Woof… sorry. I've been holding onto that one since we left Pierre."

"How charming," you mutter.

Charlie comes up behind you and wraps their arms around your waist. You feel their breath on your neck, then the brush of a kiss against your cheek. *"I love you,"* Charlie whispers.

To respond lovingly, go to ***14****.*
To change the subject, go to ***17****.*

(11)

14

"I love you, too." You turn your head toward Charlie and kiss back. *"Now scoot! I need to finish dinner."*

You busy yourself in the kitchen while Charlie flops onto the bed. *"I'm so glad we're here."*

"Me too."

"I think it'll be really good for us; you know?"

"Yeah."

"Like Doctor O'Brien told us," Charlie says, staring at the cabin's warped reflection in the mirror black TV screen, *"getting away from everything to just focus on us will be great. I think it could be really healing…"*

To talk about plans for tomorrow, go to ***18****.*
To reassure Charlie, go to ***15****.*

(13, 16)

15

"Yeah," you say with a faint smile. *"It'll be great. I know it."*

A few minutes pass, then you serve up the burgers. You and Charlie sit and eat silently. You find the cabin's nearby window strange. Outside it's so dark that all you can see is your own reflection. It's like looking into a mirror.

"What do you wanna do tonight?" you ask, mouth half-full.

Charlie raises an eyebrow. You roll your eyes.

"Seriously."

"Well, you wanna go on a hike tomorrow, right?"

You nod.

"How about we just fire up a movie and take it easy?" Charlie gestures at the TV.

To agree, go to ***19****.*
To complain, go to ***25****.*

(14, 17)

16

There's a little round table in the corner of the kitchen. You sit at it and rest your head in your hands. You wonder how much Mark—Charlie's brother—paid for this place, and whether it had been worth it considering he's never out here. You also wonder if the cabin fixed his marriage like it's supposed to be helping you and Charlie's relationship. Somehow, you doubt it.

Charlie emerges from the bathroom, sighing contentedly.

"Woof… sorry. I've been holding onto that one since we left Pierre."

"How charming," you mutter.

Charlie comes up behind you and wraps their arms around your waist. You feel their breath on your neck, then the brush of a kiss against your cheek. *"I love you,"* Charlie whispers.

To respond lovingly, go to ***14****.*
To change the subject, go to ***17****.*

(11)

17

"How do you want your burger?"

"Erm. Medium, I guess."

"Okay. Thanks."

You stay in the kitchen. Charlie hovers uncertainly for a moment, then walks away and flops down on the bed. *"I'm so glad we're here."*

"Me too."

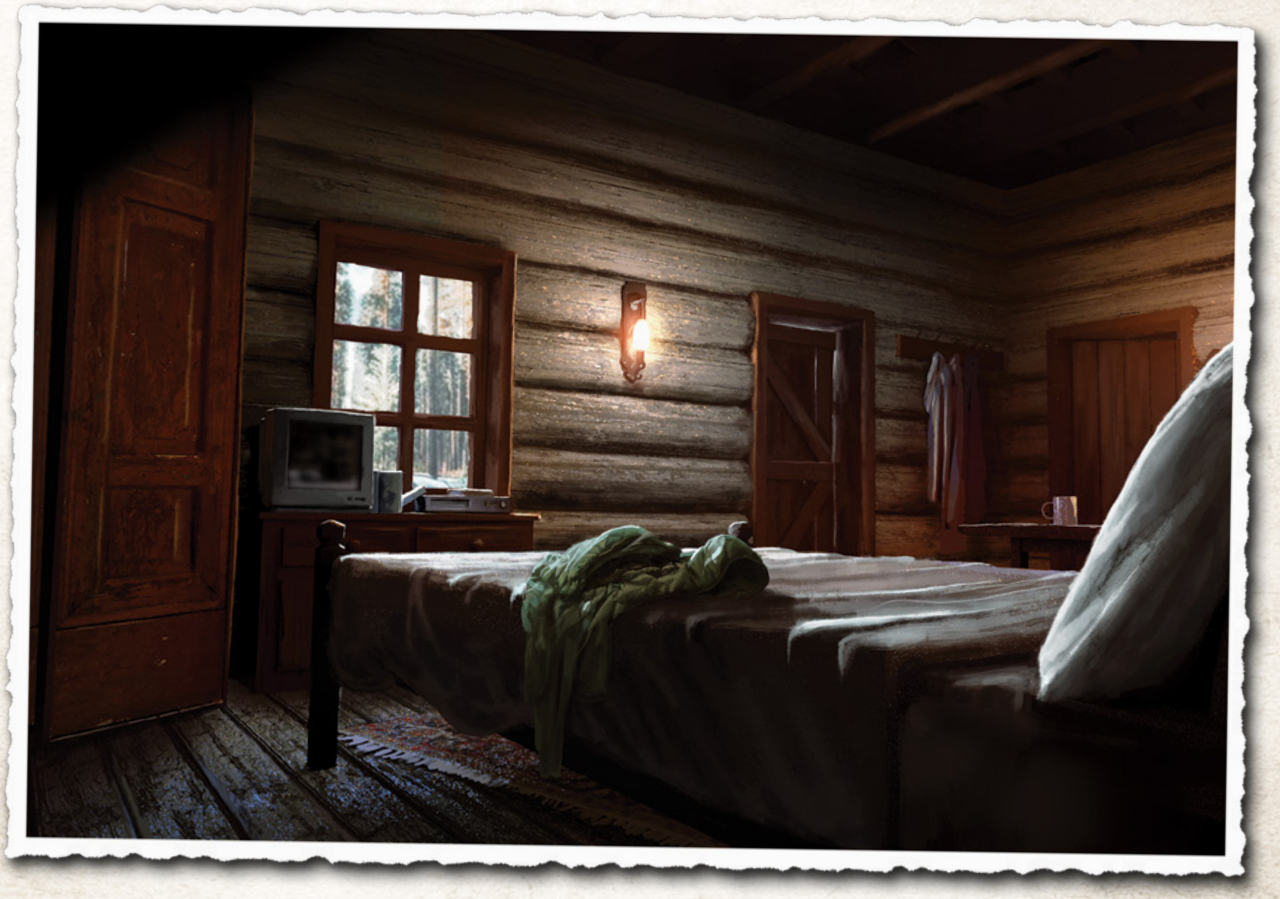
"I think it'll be really good for us; you know?"

"Yeah."

"Like Doctor O'Brien told us," Charlie says, staring at the cabin's warped reflection in the mirror black TV screen, *"getting away from everything to just focus on us will be great. I think it could be really healing…"*

Check/tick ***Broken Heart*** *on the log sheet.*
To talk about plans for tomorrow, go to ***18****.*
To reassure Charlie, go to ***15****.*

(13, 16)



18

"You still wanna go on a hike with me tomorrow?"

Charlie chuckles. *"Yeah, sure. I mean, what else we gonna do, right?"* Their laughter hangs awkwardly in the air for a moment. Then Charlie coughs and quickly changes tone. *"It's beautiful here though, really."*

"Yeah."

"I can't wait to see the sunrise."

After a few minutes, you serve up the burgers. Dinner passes in near total silence.

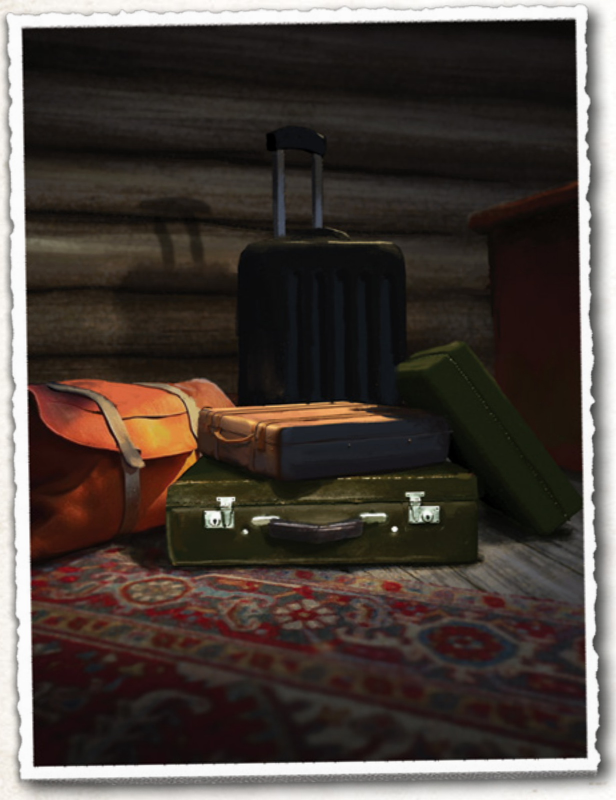
"What about tonight though?" Charlie asks.

You swallow your last mouthful of food. *"What about it?"*

"It's been a long day. How about we catch a flick?" Charlie gestures at the TV.

*To agree, go to **19**.*
*To complain, go to **25**.*

(14, 17)



The Luggage

19

"Sure," you say.

Charlie grins, then takes the dishes and heads over to the sink to clean them. You walk over to the TV unit.

It's a relatively cheap model from the late 1980s sitting on top of a dusty VCR player. You switch both on and open a cabinet beneath them, wondering what videos Charlie's brother and his wife left behind.

"He sure likes scary movies," you say, looking over the titles. Fifteen different tapes, and you're sure that covers pretty much every major slasher film of the last decade. *"God, none of these looks good."*

"There's not even a single comedy?" Charlie asks from the kitchen.

*Make a **Spot Hidden** roll:*

- *If you succeed the roll, go to **26**.*
- *If you fail the roll, go to **20**.*

(15, 18)

20

You take out the tapes and go through them one by one, rolling your eyes and performatively gagging at each cover as you go.

Charlie walks over and joins you. *"Maybe we should have stopped by a Blockbuster on the way."*

"You're telling me. These covers all look cheap. Think they're bootlegged?"

"Probably." Charlie shrugs. *"I could have sworn he said there was more than just horror. He said they watched something that sounded like a chick flick last time they came up."*

"Maybe it's still in the VCR?"

Charlie leans over and presses the eject button on the machine. There is a whirring of mechanical internals then the unit spits out a tape.

"Ah-hah!" Charlie says.

"Is it blank?" you ask.

"Nothing written on it. But they're bootlegs, right?"

You shrug. *"Whatever. Rewind it and we'll take our chances. It can't be worse than any of these."*

*To watch the movie right away, go to **28**.*
*To get ready for bed first, go to **21**.*

(19, 25)

21

You grab your bag with one hand and head for the bathroom. *"I'll be right back,"* you say, and slip inside. It's even colder in the bathroom. You set the bag on the sink and blink at your reflection staring back at you from a nearby mirror.

The door creaks open just a little. You sigh and push it closed again but it doesn't take. You look closer and see a little latch at head height. The door obviously can't hold itself shut unless it's locked. You roll your eyes, ignore the door, and brush your teeth.

A few minutes later you return to the main room and change while Charlie waits patiently on the bed. The movie is all set up, paused at the beginning. You climb up onto the bed and settle in as well.

"Ready for the random, hopefully-not-horror film?" Charlie asks.

"Sure am, start it up!" You smile and slip under the blankets. Charlie presses play on the remote.

Check/tick ***Occupied*** *on the log sheet.*

Go to ***22****.*

(20, 26)

22

When the film begins, the screen is black. There is faint music but no opening credits. Then, the screen cuts to blurry footage that was clearly recorded on a hand-held camera.

"Is this one of Mark's home movies?" you ask.

Charlie laughs then reaches for the remote. *"Oh wow. I'm sorry."*

"Wait a second, that looks familiar," you say, pointing at the TV. Charlie hesitates.

On screen, you see a wall of tall forest trees. Leaves and pine needles crunch under the feet of whoever's filming. The camera pans across the landscape, creating a blur of greens and browns. Suddenly, you spot Mark's cabin, standing alone in its little clearing. A dull red sedan is parked out front.

"That's Julie's car," Charlie says.

"This must have been after their wedding."

The camera is shaky. Wind rushes against the microphone, causing a brief flurry of horrid scraping from the speakers. There's movement near the red car. A woman, Julie, is taking bags from the trunk. She's smiling.

"Yeah," Charlie says. *"This is at least five, six years ago."*

Julie turns as the cabin door opens. Mark steps out, walks over, and takes one of the bags from her. They smile and exchange unheard words.

You sit bolt upright. *"What the hell?"*

"What's wrong? It's only Mark."

"Yeah, so who's filming?"

Charlie stammers and blinks.

On the screen, Mark and Julie go inside and close the door behind them. The camera zooms in toward the window. The picture is a grainy blur of colors. You see movement in the cabin. The camera zooms even closer. Then, harsh wind picks up and howls through the speakers. The image smashes to a slurry of loud static. White noise booms out into the room. The sound drills into your skull. You feel like it's going to make your head explode.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

Make a ***Sanity*** *roll; if you fail, lose 1 Sanity and check/tick* ***Unsettled*** *on the log sheet.*

To cover your ears, go to ***29****.*

To scramble for the dial and turn it down, go to ***23****.*

(21, 28)

23

You dart from the bed, grimacing at the ear-splitting noise. You switch the dial and kill the TV.

Charlie is sitting on the bed with their hands clamped over their ears like a dope. *"Sorry, it's only a remote for the VCR. There's no volume control."*

"What the hell was that?" you ask angrily as you step away and slump back onto the bed.

Charlie shrugs. *"I dunno."*

"Mark and Julie came out here with someone else?"

Charlie laughs. *"I don't really want to think about what my brother and his wife might get up to when they're out here."*

You roll your eyes. *"That was creepy. It was like a peeping Tom."*

"Well, we know it's not." Charlie gestures to the TV cabinet. *"Why would Mark and Julie have the tape?"*

If ***Broken Heart*** *is checked on the log sheet, you cannot stay calm. You must go to* ***24****.*

To get frustrated with Charlie, go to ***24****.*

To stay calm, go to ***30****.*

(22, 28)

24

You sigh. *"Whatever. You always know best, right?"*

Charlie frowns. *"What's that supposed to mean?"*

You remember the car ride up. The way Charlie was reading the map while driving, refusing your help, and getting lost over and over. *"Never mind,"* you say, then roll over in bed. *"Can you get the light?"*

"You don't want to watch a movie anymore?"

"No," you say, and pull the blanket tight around yourself. *"I just want to sleep."*

Charlie sighs, *"Fine."* You feel the bed shift as they stand. *"I just think that—"*

The TV set blares to life again. It bellows static throughout the cabin. Thunderous scraping and coughing bounces off the walls. You thrash and cover your ears. Charlie swears but you can hardly hear it. The noise builds to a frenetic peak. It's almost unbearable. Then, just as quickly as it began, the noise stops and the TV falls silent. All the lights in the cabin go dead.

The power is out.

*Check/tick **Blame Game** on the log sheet.*

*Go to **31**.*

(23, 29)

25

"Wow, I love to drive for five hours just to sit and watch TV like we do at home."

"Oh c'mon. It was a long drive. Let's relax. Here, let me." Charlie takes the finished dishes and starts cleaning up. *"Julie and Mark came here a bunch. He said there's plenty of movies in the cabinet. You can pick whatever one you want. I'm sure you'll see something you love."*

"Oh yeah?" you ask, skeptical.

"I promise." Charlie nods toward the TV. *"Go on."*

You get up and go and sit in front of the TV cabinet across from the bed. It's a relatively cheap unit from the late 80s sitting on top of a dusty VCR player. You switch both on, then open a cabinet beneath, looking for videos.

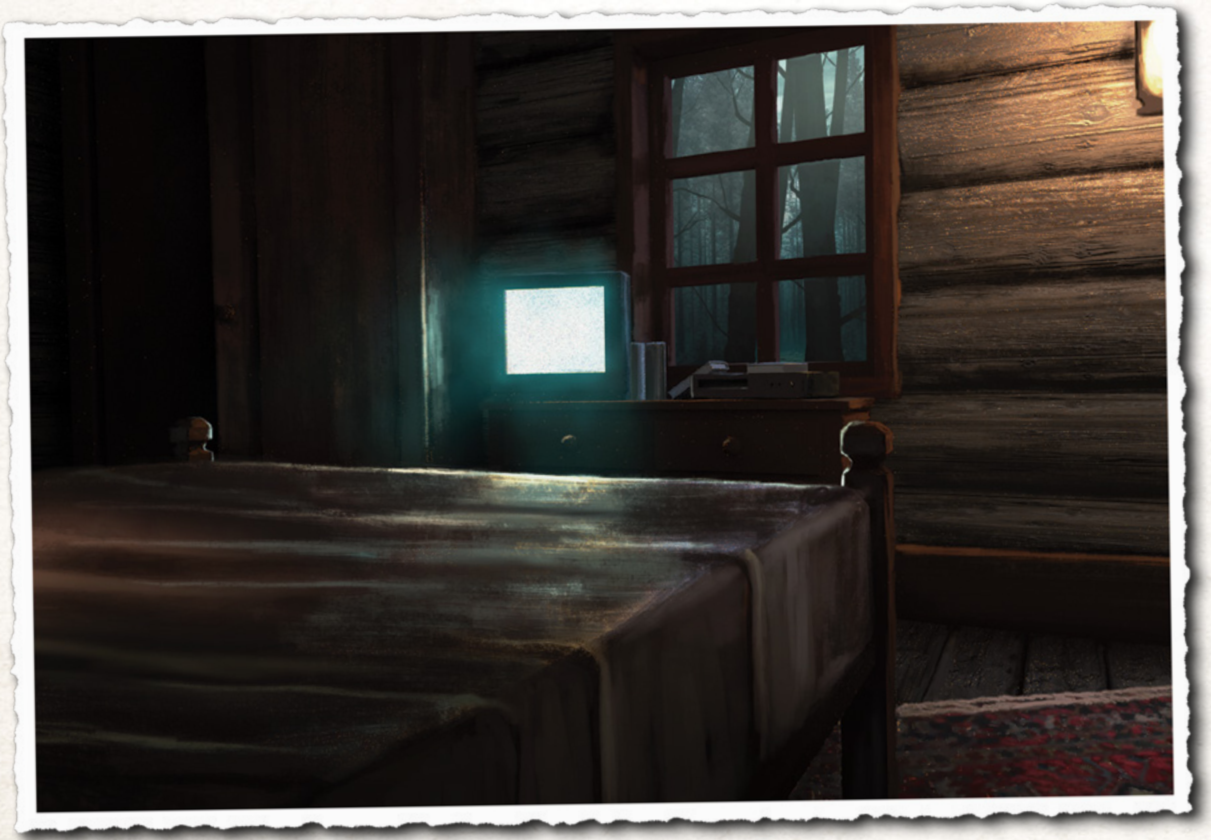
"Can't see anything but horror movies," you say, looking over the titles. Pretty much every major slasher film of the last decade. *"None of these look any good. Unless you brought me here to murder me."*

"No, there's got to be a comedy in there somewhere," Charlie says from the kitchen.

*Make a **Spot Hidden** roll:*

- *If you succeed the roll, go to **26**.*
- *If you fail the roll, go to **20**.*

(15, 18)



The Television

26

As you're leafing through the tapes, you notice something at the back of the cabinet. You reach inside and pull it out. It's an empty slipcase for a VHS tape. It's flimsy. Someone has scrawled a title on it in black marker: *The Flowers in the Stream.*

You incredulously read the name aloud.

"What's that?" Charlie says.

"Empty case."

Charlie walks over, wiping their wet hands on their pants. *"I've never even heard of that movie."*

"Should have stopped at Blockbuster," you mutter. *"It looks like a bootleg. This is just the box though; I can't find the tape."*

"Maybe it's still in the VCR?"

Charlie leans over and presses the eject button. There is a whirring of internal mechanisms, then the unit spits out a tape.

"Ah-hah!" Charlie says.

You nod. *"Okay. Well, rewind it and we'll take our chances. It can't be worse than any of these."* You gesture at the smattering of schlocky horror tapes.

*Check/tick **The Flowers in the Stream** on the log sheet.*

*To get changed before the movie, go to **21**.*

*To lay on the bed and watch it now, go to **28**.*

(19, 25)

27

"I accept."

You sag as soon as you say the words. Dread washes over you, but so does a great sense of relief. After everything that's happened to you, all the exhausting things, it's relieving to just… let go. You put your misgivings to the side. Somehow, you know you're signing your death warrant, if not something worse, but at least you've done so willingly, and taken back some measure of control.

The creature before you moves slowly closer. It takes you toward it, delicately. Thousands of writhing tentacles begin to envelop you, obscuring your vision. Then, you feel a sharp, painful jab against your chest. A sharp tentacle has stabbed into your heart. You cough, involuntarily. Tiny droplets of floating-liquid-static dribble out the corners of your mouth.

From behind, you hear voices. First one, then dozens, then hundreds. Before long, there are an uncountable number, all cheering, all wailing, all crying, and all whispering the same name over and over again. *"Ush-Tik-a! Ush-Tik-a!"*

The voices give way to static. Your vision fades away too. An awareness comes over you. It's a wholly indescribable feeling. You hear the thoughts of hundreds of different people and feel the soil of a thousand different places—places on this planet and on innumerable others scattered across the cosmos. It's a cacophony of endless noise. A perfect contortion of sound, blended to make one, long venomous drawl.

As static overwhelms your being, you realize that each tiny speck looks like its own private little star. Your final thought is how beautiful they look.

*Go to **354**.*

(9, 363)

28

You flop onto the bed and stretch your legs. Charlie rewinds the tape, takes the VCR remote, then lays down next to you.

"Cozy?"

"Yep," you say.

"Alright. Wildcard movie is go." Charlie smiles, then hits play.

*Go to **22**.*

(20, 26)

29

You clamp your hands hard over your ears but somehow the static still seeps in. Charlie, next to you, does the same. Their lips are moving, but you can't tell what they're saying.

You yell something about the remote, but even your own voice is lost, hidden beneath the TV's digital wailing.

Charlie pulls one hand down and fiddles with the remote. The screeching continues. Charlie snarls, tosses the remote aside, then staggers over to the TV. You watch them go. The TV looks reflected somehow in the windows behind it. Pine trees stand guard on the Black Hills outside, but they're riddled with static. Riddled with static. Static. STATIC!

You clamp your eyes shut.

Charlie turns the dial on the TV and kills the noise. The screen goes black. A blaring ring lingers a little in your ears.

"What in the hell was that?" you ask.

Charlie catches their breath for a moment, then shrugs. *"I dunno..."*

"How the hell was it so damn loud?"

"Top of the range speakers?"

You roll your eyes. *"Great. At least there's a top TV to watch a creepy peeping Tom video on."*

"Oh, c'mon. That wasn't a peeping Tom." Charlie gestures to the TV cabinet. *"Why would Mark and Julie have the tape?"*

*If **Broken Heart** is checked on the log sheet, you cannot stay calm. You must go to **24**.*

*To get frustrated with Charlie, go to **24**.*

*To stay calm, go to **30**.*

(22)

30

You shake your head and take a deep breath. *"You're right. It's stupid. Let's just forget about… whatever the hell that was."*

"You still wanna watch a movie?" Charlie asks.

"Sure. Whatever is fine. One of those schlocky flicks…," you say.

Charlie gets up. *"My pick?"*

"Your pick."

Charlie smiles and looks over the tapes in the cabinet. *"Ooh! This is a good one."* You lean forward to look at a tape that has a guy wearing a pumpkin on his head as the cover. *"I think even you'll like it, babe."*

"Somehow, I doubt it." You smile.

"No, seriously," Charlie says, and slips the tape from the case. *"It's about this guy who's a writer, and he drives up to this secluded town in Maine, right?"* Charlie hits eject on the VCR. *"And anyway, when he—"*

The TV set blares to life. It bellows static through the cabin. Thunderous scraping and coughing bounces off the walls.

You thrash and cover your ears. Charlie swears but you can hardly hear it. The noise builds to a frenetic peak. It's almost unbearable. Then, just as quick as it began, the noise stops, and the TV falls silent. All the lights in the cabin go dead. The power is out.

*Go to **31**.*

(23, 29)

31

"Charlie?" you ask the darkness.

"Yeah?"

"What was that?"

"Power's out, I think."

You hear scrambling in the darkness as Charlie shuffles along the floor, one hand touching the wall. They flick the light switch several times.

"I thought this place was on solar power?"

"Well, I guess solar power still runs out."

"Is there a back-up or anything?"

"I dunno. I guess I'll have to head into town and call Mark in the morning."

"Oh, that's just great." You pull your legs to your chest. *"Okay, whatever."*

You're not used to this level of dark. The city doesn't get dark like this. You raise your hand in front of your face. You can't even see its outline. You feel anxiety rising in your chest.

*If either **Broken Heart** or **Blame Game** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you cannot lean on Charlie for support. You must go to **33**.*

*To lean on Charlie for support, go to **32**.*

*To give up and go to sleep, go to **33**.*

(24, 30)

32

"Charlie, can you come to bed?"

"Sure."

The bedframe creaks as Charlie crawls onto it. In the silence following the outburst from the TV, even the slightest sound rings deafeningly loud in the quiet. You feel Charlie cuddle up close to you.

"I'm sorry," Charlie says.

"Don't be."

"Must just be an old shoddy set. I think Mark has had it since the 80s. We'll fix it tomorrow."

You murmur softly in agreement. Charlie wraps an arm around you. You feel their breathing on the back of your neck. It slows quickly and soon fades into the gentle rumble of sleep. The sound is steady and calming. Before long, you drift off, too. The only sound that disturbs you is the faint creaking of pines echoing softly through the Black Hills.

Go to ***34****.*

(31)

33

This cabin sucks. You shift around on the lumpy bed and try to get comfortable. Charlie joins you before long. The bedframe creaks when they settle onto it.

"*…Babe?"* Charlie says.

"What?"

"Are you going to sleep?"

"What else am I supposed to do? The power is out and we're in the middle of the woods."

"Okay, sorry." Charlie rolls over. At least you think they do. It's hard to tell in the dark. After a few moments, they speak again.

"Must just be an old shoddy TV. I think Mark has had it since the 80s."

"I don't care. Can we just make sure the power is back tomorrow?"

"Yeah. I'll do everything I can."

"Fine. Goodnight then," you say.

"*Goodnight."*

Charlie doesn't stay awake long. You hear their breathing slow quickly and fade into the gentle rumble of sleep. For you, sleep comes much later. The creaking of pines, the howl of cold wind, and other strange and unidentifiable sounds echo through the Black Hills around you. The anxiety in your chest burns as you lie silently in the dark. It's a relief when you finally fall asleep.

Check/tick ***Nyctophobe*** on the log sheet.
Go to ***34****.*

(31)

34

When you wake in the morning you are alone.

You stir in the bed and sit up. *"Babe?"*

There's no answer. The only sound is the wind outside, carrying with it a gentle morning birdsong. You get up and cross to the kitchen. There's a note taped to the chunky refrigerator, which is written in familiar handwriting:

"Sorry again. Just want this weekend to be special. Gone to town to get help fixing power. Back ASAP. Love you."

You set the note down. Looks like you have a few hours to yourself.

To eat some breakfast, go to ***35****.*
To go for a brisk walk, go to ***37****.*

(32, 33, 205, 207)

35

You scrounge up some bacon and eggs. The spit and splutter of cooking fat fills the kitchen. The leaden quiet out here is unsettling. More than once you make to turn the radio on before remembering that it won't work with the power out. You poke at your eggs idly with a spatula and slowly run your eyes across the room. They land on the dormant television set. Your heartbeat quickens.

You frown. It's embarrassing how much that stupid video tape affected you. You roll your eyes and turn off the gas.

You eat your hearty breakfast in silence. Once you're done and have washed the dishes, you realize you've got nothing else to do, so decide to go for a walk.

To leave right away, go to ***36****.*
To wait a few minutes in case your partner returns, go to ***41****.*

(34)

36

Outside, the air is fresh, the sun is warm, and the sky is mostly clear. You fill your lungs with the scent of moist soil and pine trees. You take a few steps forward and peer down the driveway. It weaves away into the woods. The trees are so thick here that you'd probably have a better chance listening out for cars than looking for them.

You turn and head down a walking trail just by the cabin. The earth has been worn smooth by the hiking shoes of innumerable visiting families.

To slowly get excited about this vacation, go to ***39****.*
To grow even more anxious, go to ***40****.*

(35)

37

Outside, the air is fresh, the sun is warm, and the sky is mostly clear. You fill your lungs with the scent of moist soil and pine trees. You take a few steps forward and peer down the driveway. It weaves away into the woods. The trees are so thick here that you'd probably have a better chance listening out for cars than looking for them.

You turn and head down a walking trail just by the cabin. The earth has been worn smooth by the hiking shoes of innumerable visiting families.

The forest grows thicker around you as you walk. Unseen critters skitter past in the underbrush. Birds move through the branches above, calling out and making pine needles rustle.

You come across a blueberry bush just by the trail.

To stop and collect berries, go to ***38****.*
To continue your walk, go to ***39****.*

(34)

38

You squat down and pick berries from the bush. Their flesh is weak. Juices spill off and stain your fingers purple. You're about to lick them clean when you hesitate. Blueberries are safe to eat, right? It wouldn't be a good look to accidentally poison yourself the first time you set foot outside the cabin.

Make a ***Natural World*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed the roll, go to* ***77****.*
- *If you fail the roll, go to* ***104****.*

(37, 42)

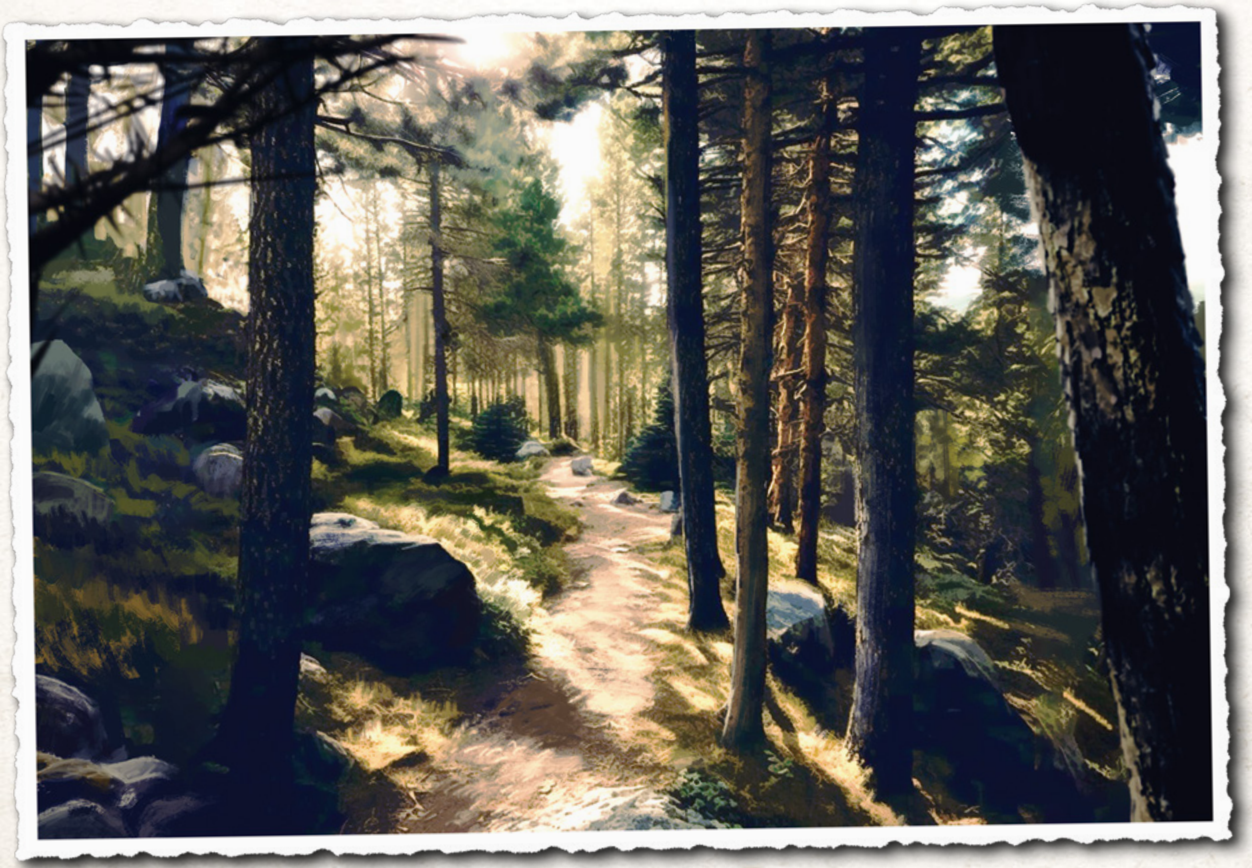
39

The nature surrounding you eats away at the stress layered into your being. You feel yourself truly smile for the first time in weeks. It happens without any effort on your part. It feels good. You close your eyes and turn your face to the sky. The fresh air and sunlight kiss your skin. It's glorious.

Off to the left, you hear running water. You open your eyes and look towards the source of the sound. It's coming from just off the trail you've been walking along.

To investigate the sound, go to ***44****.*
To stick to the trail, go to ***49****.*

(36, 37, 42)



A Forest Walk

40

You feel a gentle flutter in your chest as you go. You wonder about the day before, about the long drive and your relationship. Then, you think of the howling television static.

You fold your arms and continue walking. It's hard to keep that image out of your head. You keep your eyes on the trail and force yourself to focus on the now. That's the best advice you've received: focus on the now.

Off to the left, you hear running water.

To investigate the sound, go to ***44****.*
To stick to the trail, go to ***49****.*

(36)

41

You loiter in the front of the cabin for a few minutes, pacing. You check your watch. There's no sign of your partner, just the sun getting higher in the sky and the world outside warming in its rays.

You sit for a moment on a little plastic chair by a pile of chopped firewood.

Make a ***Spot Hidden*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed the roll, go to* ***42****.*
- *If you fail the roll, go to* ***43****.*

(35)

42

An unusual shape catches your eye, and you do a double take. A large axe has fallen between the wood pile and the wall of the cabin.

You stand up, bend down, and pry it carefully from its resting place. It's covered in cobwebs. You set the axe against the wall by the door and dust off your hands.

You take another glance down the driveway, but the road is still empty. No sense waiting any longer. You decide to begin your walk alone.

You exit the house, take a deep breath of forest air, then head down a nearby walking trail. It has been worn smooth by the hiking shoes of innumerable vacationing families.

The forest grows thicker around you as you walk. Unseen critters skitter past in the underbrush. Birds move through the branches above, calling out and shaking pine needles to the forest floor.

You come across a blueberry bush alongside the trail.

Check/tick ***Lumberjack*** *on the log sheet.*
To stop and collect berries, go to ***38****.*
To continue your walk, go to ***39****.*

(41)

43

You are too distracted to focus. You keep glancing down the driveway, but it remains empty. When the boredom gets too much, you decide to begin your walk alone.

You exit the house, take a deep breath of fresh air, and head down a nearby walking trail. It has been worn smooth by the hiking shoes of innumerable vacationing families.

The forest grows thicker around you as you walk. Unseen critters skitter in the nearby underbrush. Birds move overhead, calling out and shaking pine needles to the forest floor.

Off to the left, you hear running water.

To investigate the sound, go to ***44****.*
To stick to the trail, go to ***49****.*

(41)

44

You step off the trail and stride through the forest towards the sound of running water. The ground is uneven, so you steady yourself on the trunks of nearby pines as you go.

You walk for a little while until the sound of the water gets louder. You crest a small ridge and discover a bubbling stream just on the other side. The water is rushing downhill fast, headed south. It's clear and fresh. The trickling sound is melodic.

If ***The Flowers in the Stream*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, this place reminds you of something, you must go to* ***48****.*
To take a drink from the stream, go to ***45****.*
To sit for a moment and enjoy the serenity, go to ***50****.*

(39, 40, 43, 77, 104)

45

You carefully walk down to the riverbank. Loose leaves and pine needles wash downstream in a tiny rendition of white-water rafting.

You drop to your knees, scoop a handful of clear water into your palm, and bring it to your lips. It's cold and refreshing.

Make a ***Listen*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***46****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***51****.*

(44)

46

Beyond the stream, between the trees, you hear twigs snapping. You stiffen, then stand up tall.

Suddenly, a deer emerges from the tree line. It steps slowly toward the stream, then spots you, freezes, and stares.

The water running between you and the deer is the only thing that moves. You are both completely still, watching each other.

You notice one of the deer's eyes is swollen with pus and blood.

Make a ***Natural World*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***47****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***53****.*

If you fail but wish to ***Push the Roll****, you may roll a second time at the risk of stepping onto the unstable riverbank:*

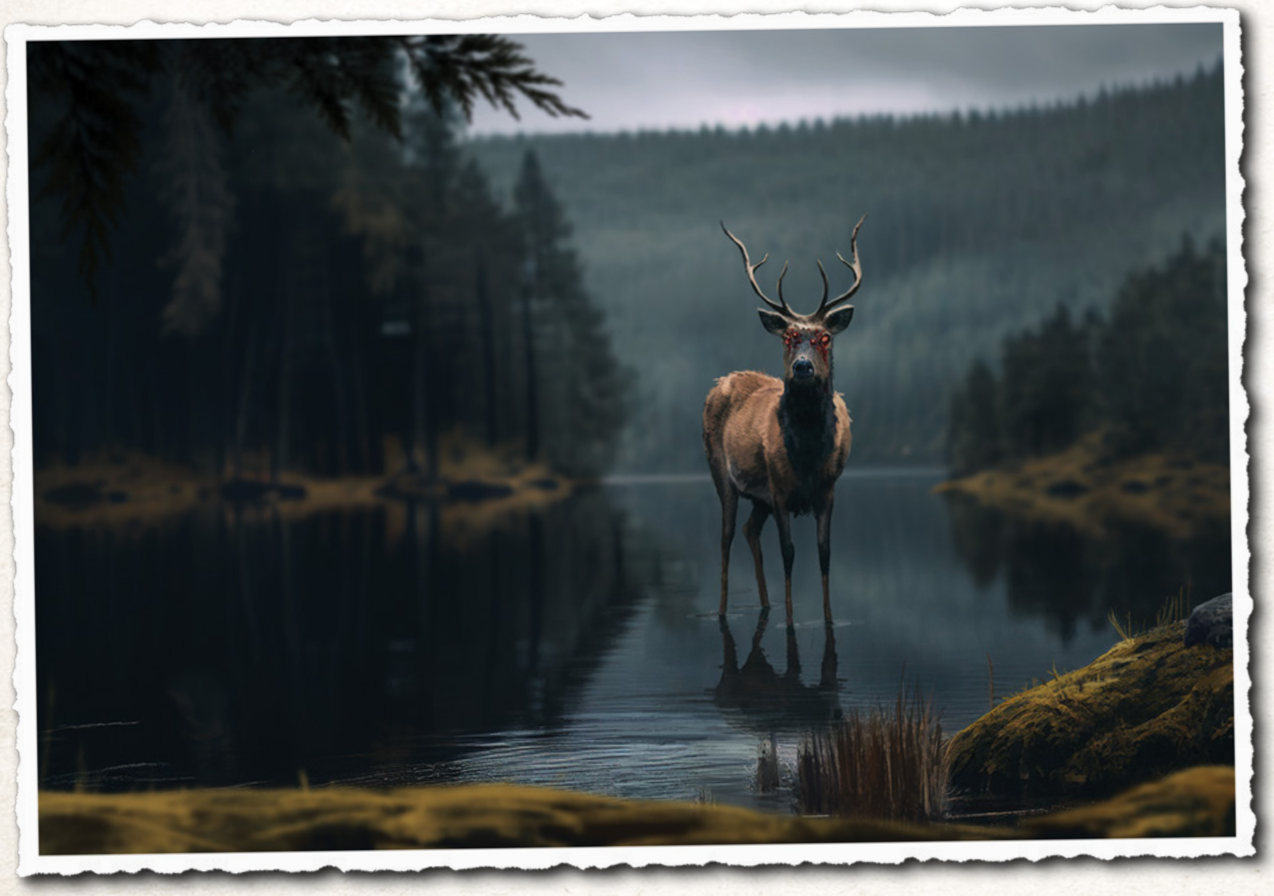
- *If you succeed the pushed roll, go to* ***47****.*
- *If you fail the pushed roll, go to* ***54****.*

(45, 50)

47

You've watched enough nature documentaries to know that whatever's infecting the deer's eye isn't common; it doesn't look like any of the frightening diseases, prions, or parasites you've seen on TV.

You take a step toward the deer, palms raised, trying to look non-threatening.



The Wounded Deer

As soon as you move, the deer turns and bolts. It vanishes into the colors of the forest within seconds. You're left alone by the stream.

Creepy. You'd better get back to the trail.

Check/tick ***Veterinarian*** *on the log sheet.*
Go to ***55****.*

(46)

48

You flinch. The black marker label on the video tape that played just before the TV blew up jumps to your mind: *The Flowers in the Stream.* Looking at this stream, the flowers at its bank, and the leaves drifting down on its current, the memory of screeching static rings in your ears.

You lift your eyes from the water and look around you. There's nothing unusual here. Just the trail at your back and lonely pines all along the length of the water.

You are alone.

Go to ***49****.*

(44)

49

It's time to keep walking. You refocus your mind and head determinedly down the trail, farther down the Black Hills and deeper into the forest. It's a pleasant hike. Sunlight filters through pine branches and casts up dancing shadows all about you in the cool morning air.

After a half hour or so, you feel nature calling and step behind a tree to pee.

You are fumbling with your clothes when you spot something. Ahead, off the trail and nestled in a narrow valley, is a dilapidated wooden shed.

To investigate the shed, go to ***56****.*
To ignore the shed, go to ***79****.*

(39, 40, 43, 48, 51, 77, 104)

50

You carefully walk down to the riverbank. Loose leaves and pine needles wash downstream in a tiny rendition of white-water rafting. Steadying yourself against a tree, you sit down on the riverbank, lean back, and close your eyes. A breeze brushes across on your face and hair. You admire the way the sunlight paints the inside of your eyelids red and yellow.

Make a ***Listen*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***46****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***51****.*

(44)

51

You take in a deep breath and smile. It feels so pleasant out here. You're cool and warm all at once. The solitude feels invigorating somehow.

There is a sudden movement in the trees nearby. You dart your head toward the sound, but it's too late. Whatever was there a moment ago is gone. A few shaken branches left in its wake are the only sign of its passing.

To call out, go to ***52****.*
To leave the serene stream, go to ***49****.*

(45, 50)

52

You stand tall and cup your hands to your mouth. *"Hello?"*

Your voice rings out, but it is eaten by thick foliage and the sound of rushing water.

You stand a few moments longer, but nothing returns your call. You are alone in the forest.

Creepy. You'd better get back to the trail.

Go to ***55****.*

(51)

53

Deer in the wild must encounter all kinds of weird health problems. You have no idea what's afflicting this creature. It could be one of a thousand things. In any case, it doesn't seem particularly bothered by your presence. As you're standing gawking, it suddenly turns and bolts into the woods, leaving you alone.

Creepy. You'd better get back to the trail.

*Go to **55**.*

(46)

54

You trudge toward the deer to try and get a better look at its eye.

As soon as you move, the deer groans, turns, and runs into the forest.

"Wait!" you call out. You step after the creature, but your foot slips on some mossy rocks by the stream bed and you tumble sideways. Your head slams hard into the earth. Everything starts spinning.

You lie dazed for a few moments before you can act. When the dizziness finally fades, you sit up groggily and feel the back of your head. You wince. It's sore to the touch. You can feel a small patch of wet blood.

You haul yourself to your feet, cursing the deer. Then, you head back toward the trail and continue your walk, gritting your teeth against the pain as you do. Great. What a fantastic start to the morning.…

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.
Take 1D4 damage.
*Go to **55**.*

(46)

55

You hit the trail and push forward, heading farther down the Black Hills and deeper into the forest.

It's a pleasant hike. Sunlight filters through pine branches and casts up dancing shadows all about you in the cool morning air.

After a half hour or so, you feel nature calling and step behind a tree to pee.

You are fumbling with your clothes when you spot something. Ahead, off the trail and nestled in a narrow valley, is a dilapidated wooden shed.

*To investigate the shed, go to **56**.*
*To ignore the shed, go to **79**.*

(47, 52, 53, 54)

56

You step through the small clearing where the shed leans lopsided against a rocky, moss-ridden mountain wall.

It's not large, maybe half the size of Mark and Julie's cabin. It's made entirely of wood. A rotting piece of pine serves as a makeshift door that's only just still hanging from the frame. The place looks like nobody has been here in years.

You step closer to the shed and put your hand against the door. It swings in slowly and easily. The shed is dark inside. You see the faint shadowy blotches of furniture hidden in the gloom.

*If **Nyctophobe** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, the darkness makes you nervous, go to **80**.*
*To leave the shed behind, go to **79**.*
*To step inside, go to **57**.*

(49, 55)

57

The only light in the shed comes from the open door and a few cracks in the uneven weatherboard walls. There's no windows. It's like this place was designed to be gloomy.

You see a small workbench, a wall mounted cupboard, and a stack of cardboard boxes. The rest of the furniture is mildewy and unremarkable. The floorboards creak beneath you as you walk across the room.

Depending on your choices, you may return to this entry several times—select an option you have not already chosen.
*To search the cupboard, go to **58**.*
*To look over the bench, go to **62**.*
*To rifle through the boxes, go to **65**.*
*To leave the shed, go to **78**.*

(56, 59, 60, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 74, 82)

58

The cupboard hangs precariously from a dilapidated wall. It has a stressful, forward tilt, gripped by gravity. You see a few rusted nails securing it in place.

You carefully open the doors.

Within are two little shelves, both lined with video tapes. They're home tapes, like the ones Mark had, with white stickers on the front marked by black sharpies. The tapes are all caked with moss and spiderwebs.

*Make a **Spot Hidden** roll to search through the tapes:*
- *If you succeed, go to **59**.*
- *If you fail, go to **60**.*

*If you fail but wish to **Push the Roll**, you may roll a second time at the risk of your time searching being cut short:*
- *If you succeed the pushed roll, go to **59**.*
- *If you fail the pushed roll, go to **61**.*

(57)

59

You notice an empty space in the row of tapes where one is missing. You reach out and take the tape next to it. It is a little less damaged than the rest. Maybe it will still work. The black marker title reads: *The Quiet in the Evening*.

You take the tape and tuck it away.

All the videos have weird names. You note a few: *The Sun With the Trees*, *Hoping It Erupts*, *The Way She Moves in the Night*, and *The Cry of the Children*.

You narrow your eyes, anxiety rising, and gently close the cupboard door.

*Check/tick **The Quiet in the Evening** on the log sheet.*
*Go back to **57**.*

(58)

60

The tapes all have weird names scrawled in the same handwriting. You note a few: *The Sun with the Trees*, *Hoping It Erupts*, *The Way She Moves in the Night*, and *The Cry of the Children*.

None of them stand out to you. Maybe this was a prospective site for a rural video store. You narrow your eyes and gently close the cupboard door.

*Go back to **57**.*

(58)

61

You stand at the open cupboard door for a few minutes, staring at the tapes within.

They all have weird names, each scrawled in the same hand. You note a few: *The Sun with the Trees*, *Hoping It Erupts*, *The Way She Moves in the Night*, and *The Cry of the Children*.

You're tilting your head, considering them, when you hear a noise outside. It's the unmistakable sound of a car engine. The sound bounces off the mountain face, dancing in the echo of the forest.

Your partner is returning, at last, and with them, the power must be coming on.

You abandon your investigation, dash out of the shed, and run back up the forest trail.

*Go to **85**.*

(58)

62

The bench is laden with a collection of tools. None have been touched in years. They are covered in greasy dust. You see a dull gray hammer. Perhaps it could be useful? There's also what looks like a specialized, miniature screwdriver set.

*To take the hammer, go to **63**.*
*To examine the screwdriver set, go to **64**.*
*Otherwise, go back to **57**.*

(57)

63

The hammer is rusty, and the leather grip is crumbling, but it's still heavy. That's all that matters, right?

You take the hammer and tuck it away.

*Check/tick **In Case of Emergency** on the log sheet.*
*Go back to **57**.*

(62)

64

You take the case and open it. It's full of tiny drivers. The heads are bizarre and strange shapes. Your mind whirls. What wondrous secret purpose must these tools be for? What tiny instrument were they complicit in the functioning of? What strange mystery have you stumbled upon? Your mind races as you consider the possibilities.

Seriously though, it's just a set of tiny screwdrivers. You have no idea what they're for…

*Check/tick **Toolkit** on the log sheet.*

*If **Tech Support** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you suddenly realize the screwdriver set's purpose, go to **76**.*

*Go back to **57**.*

(62)

65

The boxes are wet and caked with mildew. You open the flaps on the topmost box. The cloying smell of rot hits your nostrils as soon as you touch it. Inside is a pile of black clothing.

You pull the first article out. The smell gets worse. The clothing is all long and hooded and each is about the size of a bedsheet. This looks like something somebody would wear in one of Mark's stupid slasher films.

*To keep searching through boxes, go to **66**.*

*Otherwise, go back to **57**.*

(57)

66

You move the topmost box aside and open the next one down. This one has been more successfully protected from the elements.

Inside is a collection of dirty glass jars, a long dagger in a leather sheath, and a handheld camcorder.

Depending on your choices, you may return to this entry several times—select an option you have not already chosen:

*The first time you read this entry, if **Unsettled** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you must go to **67**.*

*To look at the jars, go to **68**.*

*To pick up the dagger, go to **69**.*

*To examine the camcorder, go to **70**.*

*To leave the boxes alone, go back to **57**.*

(65, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 73, 75)

67

You blink as you look at the camcorder. For a moment, your ears fill with the high-pitched howl of crunching static. The same sound that played last night.

You raise your hands towards your ears but as quick as the sound began, it's gone again. You step away from the boxes. You're not sure if you can stomach going through them.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

*Make a **POW** roll:*

*If you succeed, you steady yourself and focus, go back to **66**.*

*If you fail, lose 1 Sanity, then go back to **57**.*

(66)

68

You pick up one of the jars. Each contains a viscous, black substance. The stench of urine is immediate and overpowering.

You set the jar back down. Disgusting.

*Go back to **66**.*

(66)

69

The dagger is bigger than it first looked. The blade is about the length of your forearm. You remove the leather sheath and look at the glistening steel. You see your reflection, shadowed in the gloomy half-light, staring back at you.

The weight of the dagger feels good in your hand. You feel an urge to take it along with you.

*To take the dagger, check/tick **Razor Sharp** on the log sheet and make an **Occult** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **361**.*
- *If you fail, go to **362**.*

*Otherwise, go back to **66**.*

(66)

70

The chunky handheld recording device makes you shiver. Was this what filmed the video you watched last night?

The device is maybe four or five years old, but it's decayed significantly. It must have been left here to rot right while it was brand new.

*To press the buttons and see if the camcorder works, go to **71**.*

*To put the camcorder away, go back to **66**.*

(66)

71

You press all the buttons on the camcorder, but nothing happens. The battery is almost certainly dead. You can feel something rattling around inside, probably another tape. The eject button is jammed though.

*Check/tick **Tech Support** on the log sheet.*

*If **Toolkit** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you remember a useful item that might help, go to **72**.*

*Go back to **66**.*

(70)

72

That's what the screwdrivers are for! You head back over to the cupboard, grab the screwdriver set, and turn the camcorder over. You try to dismantle it to get the tape out.

*Make a **Mechanical Repair** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **73**.*
- *If you fail, go to **74**.*

*If you fail but wish to **Push the Roll**, you may roll a second time at the risk of damaging yourself and the tape:*

- *If you succeed the pushed roll, go to **73**.*
- *If you fail the pushed roll, go to **75**.*

(71)

73

You fiddle for a while with the tiny screwdrivers. After a few false starts, you hear a click. Huzzah! The eject button pops back into place. You press it and the little analog mechanisms within release the tape.

You remove the tape from the camcorder. Written on the side in black marker is *The Couple Who Came to the Cabin*.

You feel immediately queasy, but your curiosity is piqued. You take the tape.

*Check/tick **The Couple Who Came to the Cabin**.*

*Go back to **66**.*

(72, 76)

74

The camcorder stubbornly resists your efforts to open it. Maybe you should have paid more attention in wood shop or electronics in high school.

Eventually, you give up and toss the camcorder aside in frustration. What a waste of time.

*Go back to **57**.*

(72, 76)

75

You fiddle with the screwdriver set for a while, but don't make any progress. You can't get purchase on the screws and your hand keeps slipping. Eventually, you get frustrated. You shove the screwdriver into the jammed button with all your strength.

The plastic chassis of the camcorder snaps open.

The screwdriver crushes the cheap plastic of the tape and cuts straight through the bottom of the recorder into the center of your palm.

You drop the camcorder and stifle a howl, gripping your hand.

The camcorder is ruined. The tape is ruined. Your hand is bleeding a lot.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

Take 1 damage.

*Check/tick **Red Handed** on the log sheet.*

*Go back to **66**.*

(72, 76)

76

Wait… This isn't mysterious at all. These tools are probably for the camcorder.

You head back over to the boxes, grab the camcorder, and get your tools ready. You try to dismantle the whole chassis to get the tape out.

Make a ***Mechanical Repair*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***73****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***74****.*

If you fail but wish to ***Push the Roll****, you may roll a second time at the risk of damaging yourself and the tape:*

- *If you succeed the pushed roll, go to* ***73****.*
- *If you fail the pushed roll, go to* ***75****.*

(64)

77

You rub the berry residue between your fingers and frown. Maybe it's best to wait until your partner is back with the car before you put your foraging skills to the test.

You fold your arms and continue walking. You keep your eyes on the trail and force yourself to focus on the here and now.

Off to the left, you hear running water.

To investigate the sound, go to ***44****.*
To stick to the trail, go to ***49****.*

(38)

78

That's enough of that. You step out of the little shed and back into the forest. You wince in the harsh light of the sun and let your eyes adjust.

You make your way back to the trail and continue your hike for about half an hour. Then you turn and head back home.

Go to ***84****.*

(57)

79

Forget that. You've seen enough horror movies to steer well clear of little abandoned sheds found in the middle of the woods.

You continue your hike for about half an hour then turn and head back home.

Go to ***84****.*

(49, 55, 56, 82)

80

It's dark in there. Really dark. If your partner was here, you know they'd make fun of you for being a little scared of the dark. What of it though? What's wrong with that? So, you're sometimes scared of the dark…. Well, this little shed is… dark, so you don't want to go inside. Is that so bad?

Make a ***Sanity*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***82****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***81****.*

(56)

81

You consider entering the shed for a moment but shiver a little at the thought of being trapped in the tiny dark shed.

"Goddamn it," you mutter to the forest. If only your partner had fixed the damned power already.

You can't bring yourself to enter the shed. You turn away from it and go back to the walking trail.

You continue your hike for about half an hour then turn and head back home.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.
Lose 1 Sanity.
Go to ***84****.*

(80)

82

You steel yourself and gaze resolutely at the foreboding shed. So what? It's dark inside, but outside it's bright as hell and it's so small you'll never be more than two steps from the door anyway.

To enter the shed, go to ***57****.*
To go back to your hike, go to ***79****.*

(80)

83

"Please." You reach over and turn the radio off. *"I can't think with that noise."*

Alex raises up their hands defensively. *"Sorry,"* they mutter, then turn back to the window. You look back to the road. In your peripheral vision, you notice Alex shoot an irritated glance your way. The longer this trip lasts, the tenser the atmosphere in the car seems to get.

"It's the next left," you say, and try to smile reassuringly. Alex doesn't answer.

You continue deeper into the forest. The little road you're on winds erratically, dipping up and down as it weaves between hills. The sky gets lost in the branches of pine trees. As the evening shadows lengthen, you feel cold seeping in from outside.

*Go to **103**.*

(2)

84

You crest the rise that leads back to the cabin. The sun is high in the sky. It's late morning, soon to be afternoon.

You sigh. There's no sign of the car and therefore you're probably still without power or your partner, for now.

You head inside. Everything is well lit by the late morning glow. You change out of your walking clothes and leave them on the bed, then head into the bathroom to shower.

*If **Occupied** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you remember a minor detail, you must go to **86**.*

*Go to **87**.*

(78, 79, 81)

85

You're out of breath when you arrive back at the cabin. The sun is high in the sky. It's late morning and soon to be afternoon. You're panting, legs thrumming, warm from the run back up the trail.

All throughout your jog back, the sound of an approaching car echoed in your ears. It is replaced now by your heaving breaths.

You lean forward and rest your weight on your knees. Seconds drag by. You can't hear the car anymore. Did you imagine it? There is no sign of any change. You're still without your partner. You're still without power. Disappointment, and a tiny bit of fear, washes over you.

After a few minutes, you shake your head clear and head inside.

Everything is well lit by the late morning glow. You change out of your walking clothes and leave them on the bed, then head into the bathroom to shower.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

*If **Occupied** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you remember a minor detail, you must go to **86**.*

Lose 1 Sanity.

*To shower, go to **87**.*

(61)

86

You close the door behind you and turn on the shower faucet. Water cascades into the waiting tub below, filling the room with a constant loud drizzle that is almost reminiscent of white noise. The pressure is lousy without power to the pump, but gravity does most of the work. Thank God the water heater is gas powered.

You pause, remembering that the bathroom door doesn't keep itself shut. You push it closed harder and put the latch on to secure it in place.

You step into the shower and wash the morning hike away.

*To stay for a while and enjoy the soak, go to **90**.*

*To shower quickly, go to **92**.*

(84, 85)

The Shed

87

Water cascades into the waiting tub below, filling the room with a constant loud drizzle that is almost like white noise. The pressure is lousy without power to the pump, but gravity does most of the work. Thank God the water heater is gas powered.

You wash your face and scrub clean the pores of your nose. You turn around in the shower to scrub your back.

You pause.

Just ahead, the door to the bathroom is wide open. You're certain you closed it.

You shut the shower off and step out, grabbing a towel and wrapping it around you.

"Honey? Is that you?" you call out, but there's no reply.

You stand in the empty cabin. Nothing. You're alone.

*Make a **Sanity** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **88**.*
- *If you fail, go to **89**.*

(84, 85)

88

Even though you're still warm from the shower, you shiver a little. You shove the anxiety down. The door probably swung open on its own. Seems like everything in this cabin is a little faulty.

Time to get dressed.

*Go to **91**.*

(87)

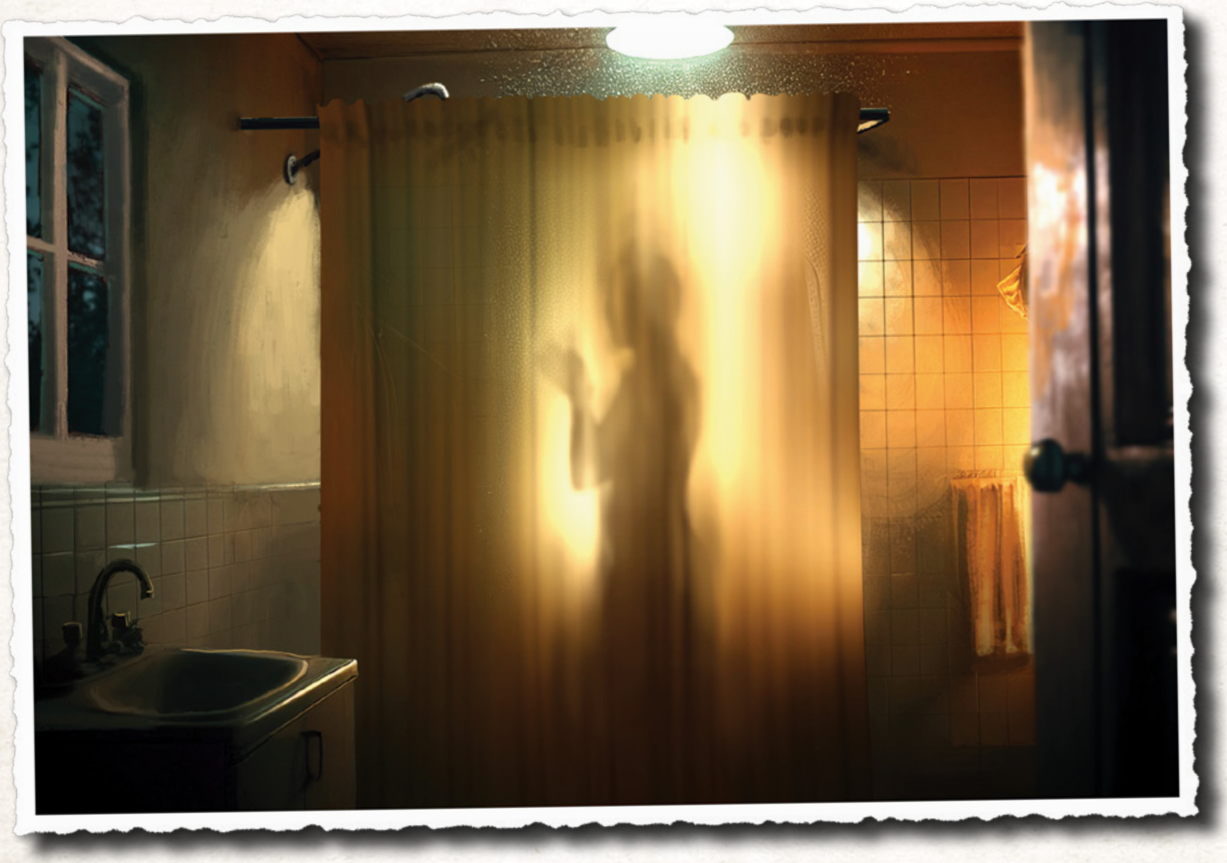
89

Was someone here? The windows are closed. Are you going mad? You were sure you shut the door. You remember doing it.

You look at the television set. It's sitting there stoic and quiet, acting like it hadn't burst your eardrums the night before.

This place sucks. The door probably swung open itself. Everything in this cabin is dodgy. That's got to be it. You hope you're right.

Time to get dressed.



The Shower

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.
Lose 1 Sanity.
Go to ***91****.*

(87)

90

The water is warm, cleansing, and healing. You love the feeling of it running over your skin. You swear the water even smells different to the water back in the city.

You stay in the shower until you're completely relaxed, ready to face the afternoon with a smile.

Heal 1 hit point and restore 1D4 Luck points.
Go to ***92****.*

(86)

91

You stretch, roll your head around a few times to work the tired muscles, then head over to the bed and open your suitcase. You purse your lips and consider how you're feeling.

To put on jeans and a tee-shirt, check/tick ***Practical*** *on the log sheet.*

Or to put on warm, soft track pants and a sweater, check/tick ***Comfortable*** *on the log sheet.*

Choose either option, then go to ***93****.*

(88, 89)

92

You get out of the shower and dry off. You step back into the cabin and decide to get dressed.

To put on jeans and a tee-shirt, check/tick ***Practical*** *on the log sheet.*

Or to put on warm, soft, track pants and a sweater, check/tick ***Comfortable*** *on the log sheet.*

Choose either option, then go to ***93****.*

(86, 90)

93

Freshly dressed, you feel renewed.

Now, what to do with the afternoon while you wait for your partner to return? Hopefully they have a solution to the power problem.

To make some food, go to ***94****.*

To search for flashlights and batteries so you have light for when it gets dark, go to ***95****.*

To try and restore the power yourself, go to ***368****.*

(91, 92)

94

You head to the kitchenette. You're glad the fridge and stove are powered by gas.

You cook up a meal then enjoy it alone at the little dining table.

Check/tick ***Well Fed*** *on the log sheet.*

If ***Survivalist*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, your stomach growls, you must go to* ***102****.*

To eat and enjoy the food, go to ***106****.*

To pick at the plate unenthusiastically and worry about your situation, go to ***107****.*

(93, 97, 98, 101, 109)

95

You know there was a heavy-duty flashlight in the car, but it's gone now. What do you have here in the cabin? Right now, when the sun goes down, you'll be left in the dark.

Make a ***Spot Hidden*** *roll:*
- *If you succeed, go to* ***97****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***98****.*

If you fail but wish to ***Push the Roll****, you may roll a second time at the risk of an unfortunate accident:*
- *If you succeed the pushed roll, go to* ***97****.*
- *If you fail the pushed roll, go to* ***99****.*

(93, 102, 106, 107)

96

You ignore the droning radio and do your best to focus on driving. Alex shifts about in their seat. They fidget, read out passing signs, and make minor small talk. You remember to answer every question with more than a single word. Doctor O'Brien told you both that communication was the most important part of a relationship. You were skeptical, but Alex seems happier after just a few minutes of conversation. The two of you joke about watching for a wandering deer that might suddenly stagger out in front of your car. At one point, Alex presses their hand against your knee and squeezes affectionately. You can't help but smile.

"*Not far now,*" you say.

"*Good, I can't wait to stretch my legs.*"

You continue deeper into the forest. The little road you're on winds erratically, dipping up and down as it weaves between hills. The sky gets lost in the branches of pine trees. As the evening shadows lengthen, you feel cold seeping in from outside.

Go to ***103****.*

(2)

97

In the cupboard beneath the sink, you find a little plastic container with a mini flashlight in it. You switch it on. It works, but the beam is weak. The batteries are probably dying.

You look for spares in the pantry, the bathroom, and in the bedside tables. Eventually, your gaze settles on the TV cabinet.

You cross the cabin to the television and perch on your knees in front of it. You open the cabinet and scan over the video tapes. You move some of them aside to look deeper into the cabinet. In the dark, right at the back, you find a blister pack of batteries. They must be kept here for the remote control, but they fit the flashlight. Jackpot.

You swap the batteries out. The beam becomes much stronger.

Check/tick ***Fully Charged*** *on the log sheet.*

If ***Well Fed*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you're bored, you must go to* ***108****.*

To cook some food, go to ***94****.*

(95)

98

In the cupboard beneath the sink, you find a little plastic container with a mini flashlight in it. You switch it on. It works, but the beam is weak. The batteries are probably dead.

You look for spares in the pantry, the bathroom, and in the bedside tables, to no avail. Eventually, you give up on searching.

Check/tick ***Running on Empty*** *on the log sheet.*

If ***Well Fed*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you're bored, you must go to* ***108****.*

To cook some food, go to ***94****.*

(95)

99

In the cupboard beneath the sink, you find a little plastic container with a mini flashlight in it. You switch it on. It works, but the beam is weak. The batteries are probably dead.

You look for spares in the pantry, the bathroom, and in the bedside tables, to no avail. Still, you refuse to give up!

You check the pantry a second time. You look more thoroughly under the sink. You double-check the bedside tables. Still nothing. You curse, frustrated, and lean against the mattress to think for a moment. A brilliant idea hits you. You stoop down and look under the bed.

In the half-darkness beneath the bed, you spy a cardboard box, covered in dust. You reach for it and slide yourself farther under the bed. You can see the box is pressed right up against the bottom of the frame—someone has really jammed it under here!

You slide yourself even farther still, squinting in the dark. You grab the box and try to shimmy it free.

You realize too late that the bedframe is broken, and that someone had jammed the box under it for support. As you pull the heavy box from its spot, a broken slat comes loose, its jagged wooden edge driving down at you.

Check/tick ***Running on Empty*** *on the log sheet.*

Make a ***Dodge*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***109****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***100****.*

(95)

100

You're too slow. The jagged shard of wood collapses under the weight of the mattress and stabs you in the side. You pull yourself free but carve a jagged scrape across the skin of your flank.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.
Take 1D4 damage.
Go to ***101***.

(99)

101

That jagged slat hurt bad. Wincing and biting your lip, you drag yourself from under the bed. "*Hell!*" you curse, and stand up, your hand pressed to the wound in your side.

You go into the bathroom and clean away the blood. After treating it with some antiseptic, warm water, and a fresh bandage you find in the medicine cabinet, it looks remarkably better.

In pain, but otherwise okay, you return to the cabin.

Make a ***First Aid*** *roll: if you succeed, restore 1 hit point.*
If ***Well Fed*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you're bored, you must go to* ***108***.
To cook some food, go to ***94***.

(100)

102

After a few minutes, your stomach rumbles. You feel something rancid bubbling in your guts.

You think back to the berries you ate in the forest and curse your adventurous appetite. You stand and head to the bathroom.

You spend the better part of the next hour emptying your bowels.

When you're done, you return to the cabin.

If ***Fully Charged*** *or* ***Running on Empty*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you're bored, you must go to* ***108***.
To look for flashlights and batteries, go to ***95***.

(94)

103

The sun gradually sets. Your car's headlights cut into the darkness, revealing the road ahead, just a few feet at a time. Finally, they drift over the front of a cabin, reflecting off two windows on either side of a front door, glaring back at you like watchful eyes. You pull up and park.

"*Finally.*" Alex sighs, stepping out onto the gravel driveway. You haul yourself out of the seat, stretch your back, and walk around to the trunk to get your bags. It's cold here. The cold night air seizes around you like a vice. You weren't expecting it to be this chilly.

"*Are you hungry?*" Alex asks, while you try to keep from shivering.

Make a ***CON*** *roll: if you fail, check/tick* ***Touched by Cold*** *on the log sheet.*
To say you are hungry, go to ***105***.
To say you aren't, go to ***111***.

(83, 96)

104

What harm could a few berries do? Plus, you're at least ninety percent sure you know what kind they are. You lick clean the residue on your fingers and pop a handful more into your mouth. Before you leave, you pick a final bunch to fill your pockets.

You stand up, chewing, and continue down the trail.

You feel a gentle flutter in your chest as you go. You wonder about the day before, about the long drive and your relationship. Then, you think of the howling television static.

You fold your arms and continue walking. It's hard to keep that image out of your head. You keep your eyes on the trail and force yourself to focus on the now. That's the best advice you've received: focus on the now.

Off to the left, you hear running water.

Check/tick ***Survivalist*** *on the log sheet.*
To investigate the sound, go to ***44***.
To stick to the trail, go to ***49***.

(38)

105

"Please. Burgers?"

Alex smiles. "*Sure.*"

You drag the bags to the cabin and unlock the door. You stick one hand inside, feel for the light switch, then flick it on.

Alex peeks inside and nods approvingly. "*Wow. Super cozy.*"

*Go to **327**.*

(103)

106

Delicious. Truly. You are a Michelin-level chef.

Anyway…

*If **Fully Charged** or **Running on Empty** are checked/ticked on the log sheet, you're bored, you must go to **108**.*

*To look for flashlights and batteries, go to **95**.*

(94)

107

The woods are lonely, dark, and deep. You're here alone, in a cabin with no power, kidding yourself that everything will be fine. So long as the sun remains up, you're able to keep yourself fooled. But you know with every passing minute that the sun is edging closer to the horizon line, racing to leave you in darkness.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

*Make a **Sanity** roll: if you fail, lose 1 Sanity.*

*If **Fully Charged** or **Running on Empty** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you're bored, you must go to **108**.*

*To look for flashlights and batteries, go to **95**.*

(94)

108

You can't think of anything else to do in the cabin, and restlessness is creeping in. For a while, you lie on the sofa and read an old beat-up paperback from a shelf in the corner. You think it's pretty good, but a little flowery and overwritten, not to mention how grating prose written in the second person can be.

*Make a **Listen** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **110**.*
- *If you fail, go to **113**.*

*If you fail but wish to **Push the Roll**, you may roll a second time at the risk of missing a critical detail:*

- *If you succeed the pushed roll, go to **110**.*
- *If you fail the pushed roll, go to **112**.*

(97, 98, 101, 102, 106, 107, 109)

109

You roll onto your other side. The splintered slat stabs into the cabin floor, jamming into the wood. That could have really hurt if it had hit you. With adrenalin thumping through your veins, you slide out from under the bed, panting hard.

Probably best to leave the searching for now. You stand back up and glance around the room.

*If **Well Fed** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you're bored, you must go to **108**.*

*To cook some food, go to **94**.*

(99)

110

You hear footsteps outside. They crunch on the gravel driveway. You sit up. You didn't hear a car approach. You stand up nervously and creep across to the window.

A balding middle-aged man is standing just outside the front door. He's dressed in a thick winter coat and has his hands in his pockets. You do not recognize him.

He lifts his hand to the cabin door and knocks.

*To pretend nobody's home and wait for the stranger to leave, go to **140**.*

*To answer the door, go to **121**.*

(108)

111

"Not especially."

"I'm starved," Alex says, and brushes past you. You roll your eyes. Looks like you're having dinner then…

You drag the bags to the cabin and unlock the door. You stick one hand inside, feel for the light switch, then flick it on. Alex peeks their head inside and nods approvingly. "*Wow. Super cozy.*"

*Go to **327**.*

(103)

112

Nature sure is noisy. You can't focus on your book. Suddenly, you remember the portable music player you brought. You get up and go digging around in your suitcase until you find it, then walk back over to the sofa.

You smile, put the headphones over your ears and recline with your eyes closed, napping to the sweet, sweet sound of alt-rock. You sleep for a while.

*Go to **139**.*

(108)

113

There is a knock at the door. You sit up sharply. You didn't hear any cars.

You wait for a moment before moving, questioning yourself. Did you imagine the sound? After a few seconds, you hear another knock, this one louder.

You stand up, cross to the front door, and open it.

A balding man is standing on the porch dressed in a thick winter coat. He has his hands in his pockets. You do not recognize him.

"Hello," he says. He isn't smiling. He looks past your shoulder into the cabin. *"Is Julie home?"*

Julie. That's Mark's wife.

*To ask who the strange man is, go to **114**.*
*To tell him Julie isn't here, go to **122**.*

(108)

114

"Sorry, who are you?" you ask. He ignores your question.

"Julie. Is she home?"

Make a ***Spot Hidden*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***115****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***118****.*

(113, 121)

115

You glance past the stranger to see the clearing behind him, where your car was parked. The clearing that leads to the main road. It's empty. This guy must have walked to the cabin.

Go to ***118****.*

(114)

116

"Do you live nearby?" you ask. He shakes his head. *"Have you broken down or something?"* He shakes his head again.

You start to feel nervous. This guy is seriously weird. *"I don't think I can help you."*

"Yes, you can," he replies.

"How?"

"You can tell me where Julie is."

To ask how this guy knows Mark and Julie, go to ***132****.*
To tell him to leave, go to ***117****.*

(118, 122)

117

This stranger gives you the creeps. He's placed awfully close to the door and is standing kind of funny. *"Sorry, you have to leave,"* you say.

"Why?"

"… Because this is private property."

He stares at you without responding. He is silent for an uncomfortably long time. He isn't moving.

"Just go," you say. *"I don't want to have to call the police."*

"You got a phone in there?" he asks.

You stay silent. You know you don't.

You can try to reason with the stranger, scare him off, or just shut the door in his face:

To scare off the stranger, make an ***Intimidate*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***119****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***130****.*

To reason with the stranger, make a ***Persuade*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***125****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***136****.*

To shut the door in his face, go to ***128****.*

(116, 118, 122, 123, 132)

118

You don't know what to say next. *"Are you lost?"* you ask.

"Just looking for Julie," he replies.

"Can you tell me your name?"

He stares at you.

You stare back. "*Sir?*" you ask.

"*Is Julie home?*" he asks again.

To keep talking, go to ***116****.*
To ask the stranger to leave, go to ***117****.*
To close the door on the stranger, go to ***128****.*

(114, 115)

119

You feel gravel in your guts. You square off to face the guy.

"Listen here," you growl, *"I'll call the goddamn police and have your ass hauled away if you don't get off our property right now. You hear?"*

He blinks. He looks down. After a moment, he turns and walks away, hands still in his pockets.

You watch him go. He doesn't head down the driveway towards the road. He takes the path that leads into the forest, the same one you went walking on earlier.

To follow the stranger, go to ***138****.*
To close the door and make sure it's locked, go to ***120****.*

(117)

120

You need to make sure the cabin's safe. You check every lock you can find. You pull the door closed and lock it, sliding across the deadbolt to make doubly sure. Then, you walk to the bathroom and check the window. You latch it shut, too.

The other windows in the cabin don't open and there's just the one door in and out. It all seems safe.

*Check/tick **Lockdown** on the log sheet.*
*To settle in for the night, go to **142**.*

(119, 125, 130, 136, 138, 140)

121

You cross to the door, unlatch it, and pull it open. *"Hello?"*

The stranger looks you up and down. His face devoid of expression.

"Hello," he says. He isn't smiling. He looks past your shoulder into the cabin. *"Is Julie home?"*

Julie. That's Mark's wife.

*To ask who the strange man is, go to **114**.*
*To tell him Julie isn't here, go to **122**.*

(110)

122

"Julie isn't here. We're just staying at the cabin."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm very sure," you say. *"I can take a message?"*

"What about Mark?" he asks. *"Is Mark here? I could speak to Mark. Have you seen him?"*

*To ask about the stranger, go to **116**.*
*To tell him that Mark isn't here, go to **123**.*
*To tell this guy to leave, go to **117**.*

(113, 121)

123

"No, Mark isn't here either."

"Oh…" He looks down, then looks back up and stares at you. Several seconds pass.

"Can I help you with anything else?"

"Where are they?" he asks.

"What's your name? I'll tell them you stopped by."

He keeps staring at you.

*To ask the stranger to leave, go to **117**.*
*To shut the door in his face, go to **128**.*

(122)

124

There's no sense in brooding. You came out here for a reason. You love Alex. You want to make this work. You can spend all day guessing how things will end up, but it won't change anything. All you can do is be the kindest and most loving person you can. Whether or not that will be enough is out of your hands.

You walk out of the bathroom, smile, and try cracking a joke. *"Woof… sorry. I've been holding onto that one since we left Pierre."*

Alex snorts, but you catch the slightest hint of a smirk. They're standing in the kitchen, chopping up vegetables. You walk over and do your best to help. Before long, you're both seated at the small dining table, eating together. Alex is not saying much. It's difficult to tell what they're thinking.

*Make a **Psychology** roll to gauge how Alex is feeling:*
- *If you succeed the roll, go to **127**.*
- *If you fail the roll, go to **129**.*

(327)

125

"Sir," you say with a smile. *"I'm not trying to be aggressive. I've been on a very long walk today, and I'm dead tired. I'm afraid you've just interrupted my nap. If there's nothing else I can do for you, do you mind if I get back to sleep? I'll tell Mark and Julie that you were asking after them the next time we speak."*

The man blinks. He looks around for a moment, grunts, and nods. He turns. Hands still in his pockets, he begins to walk away.

You watch as he goes. He doesn't head down the driveway. He takes the trail that leads into the forest. The same trail you went walking on earlier.

*To follow the stranger, go to **138**.*
*To close the door and make sure it's locked, go to **120**.*

(117)

126

This cabin sucks. Mark always seems so excited when he talks about it, but really, it's kind of a dump. Maybe it feels nicer when you're visiting with somebody you love. You and Alex haven't been that close in months. This is just one more failed attempt at reconciliation that you can add to the pile. At least you can look back on it as proof you really tried fixing things before the inevitable implosion.

You stay in the bathroom for a while, glumly staring into the mirror. Minutes crawl past. You don't want to go back out there and face Alex. While you stand, waiting, you notice the bathroom door creak open just a little. Seems like the latch is old. You lean forward and quickly pull the door shut. When you lock it, it stays in place.

Eventually, you admit you can't hide away in the bathroom any longer, so force yourself to walk back out of the bathroom with a fake smile plastered across your face.

"Woof… sorry. I've been holding onto that one since we left Pierre."

Alex doesn't look up. They just roll their eyes. They're standing in the kitchen now, chopping up vegetables. You cross over to the bed and lie down on it. All your muscles ache from the long drive. They don't feel better when you stretch. Alex says nothing. You want to talk to them but can't think of anything to say. What was it that Doctor O'Brien said the two of you should do if you were feeling distant? You can't remember.

Soon, Alex serves up dinner. The two of you huddle at the small kitchen table and eat. Alex remains silent. It's difficult to tell what they're thinking.

Check/tick ***Occupied*** *on the log sheet.*
Make a ***Psychology*** *roll to gauge how Alex is feeling:*

- *If you succeed the roll, go to* ***127****.*
- *If you fail the roll, go to* ***129****.*

(327)

127

Alex is confused. That's the only time they ever go quiet. You watch them pick at their food half-heartedly. They're probably turning things over in their head just like you are. As much as you want to blurt out questions, to talk things through, you force yourself to keep silent. Alex doesn't like that kind of direct conversation. If you start asking questions, you'll probably just annoy them. The best thing you can do is just relax. Focus on doing the things you enjoy as a couple. It will remind them of how good things can be. That's the best way forward.

Go to ***234****.*

(124, 126)

128

"Ooookayy," you say slowly and narrow your eyes. *"Thanks."*

He stares unfaltering as you shut the door in his face. You worry he might try to stick a foot in the way, but he doesn't. You lock the door.

To go back to reading, go to ***139****.*
To loiter by the door and see if he leaves, go to ***140****.*

(117, 118, 123, 132)

129

Alex keeps dodging your gaze. It's impossible to tell what's going on in their head if they won't have a conversation or even meet your gaze. They just pick at their food half-heartedly and say nothing. Maybe it's best to be blunt. *"How are you feeling?"* you ask.

"Fine," Alex replies, almost as soon as you finish talking. Silence hangs in the air for several long seconds afterwards.

Great. Well, if Alex doesn't want to talk right now so be it. You may as well look for something else to do.

Go to ***234****.*

(124, 126)

130

You try to sound authoritative, but your voice wavers.

"How about I call—" you cough accidentally and falter, a frog in your throat. *"I'll call the cops. See what they have to say about all this."*

He stares at you. His lip curls. His eyes are cold and unfeeling. You can't hold his gaze. You glance away. Your heart races.

"Fine," he says abruptly. Without another word, he turns on his heels and walks away.

Your heart keeps pounding long after he vanishes. He doesn't head down the driveway. He takes the trail that leads into the forest. The same trail you went walking on earlier.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.
Make a ***Sanity*** *roll: if you fail, lose 1 Sanity.*
To follow the stranger, go to ***138****.*
To close the door and make sure it's locked, go to ***120****.*

(117)

131

As you're leafing through the tapes, you notice something at the back of the cabinet. You reach inside and pull it out. It's an empty slipcase for a VHS tape. It's flimsy. Someone has scrawled a title on it in black marker pen: *The Flowers in the Stream.*

You incredulously read the name aloud.

"What's that?" Alex asks, coming out of the bathroom.

"Empty case. We should have stopped at a video store. I think these are all bootlegs."

Alex walks over to you. They're smiling. Maybe they did some soul searching in the bathroom, too.

"Is the tape still in the VCR?" they ask.

You lean over and press the eject button. There is a whirring of mechanical internals, then the unit spits out a tape.

"Ah-hah!" Alex says, stepping forward to pull you into a hug. *"Thank you, Charlie,"* they say. They rest their head on your shoulder for a second while you stand there holding the tape, sighing, *"I love you."*

Check/tick ***The Flowers in the Stream*** *on the log sheet.*
To respond lovingly, go to ***135****.*
To change the subject, go to ***137****.*

(234)

132

"How do you know Mark and Julie?"

"I see them."

"I'm sorry?"

"Sometimes. I see them here."

"You're a friend?" you ask. He stares blankly back. *"Sir?"*

"Are they here?"

To ask the stranger to leave, go to ***117****.*
To close the door on him, go to ***128****.*

(116)

133

You take out the tapes and go through them one by one, rolling your eyes and performatively gagging at each cover as you go.

"Anything good?" Alex asks, coming out of the bathroom.

"Not really. I could have sworn Mark said there was a romance or something. He said they watched it when they were here last summer."

Alex crosses the cabin and comes over to you. You realize they're smiling. Maybe they got stuck, soul-searching in the bathroom mirror, too.

"Is the tape still in the VCR?" they ask.

You lean over and press the eject button. There is a whirring of mechanical internals, then the unit spits out a tape.

"Ah-hah!" you say, lifting the tape up heroically. Alex claps their hands together in mock applause, then giggles, tilts their head, and considers you.

"I love you," Alex says.

To respond lovingly, go to ***135****.*
To change the subject, go to ***137****.*

(234)

134

"No!" You swing at the creature one last time. This time, your strike doesn't connect. Whipping tentacles snap out and catch both your wrists. You struggle against them. A third tentacle rises into the air in front of you. Its tip is sharp. Behind it, looms the monster's true form, an amalgamation of indescribable whipping coils of ropy, bark-encrusted flesh. You scream out at the monster. It's one last final yell of defiance.

The third tentacle shoots forward and plunges into the center of your chest. The air is driven from your lungs. Blood pours from the wound. Your vision goes gray. You struggle, trying to free your hands once more, but there's no strength left in your arms.

The final image you see before everything turns dark is fading, crawling static. Then, nothing.

THE END.

(9)

135

You smile at Alex before replying, *"I love you, too."* The two of you stay quiet for a moment afterwards and enjoy the silence. Then, you bustle over to the VCR and get everything ready. Before long, the two of you are set up in bed, looking towards the TV, with the tape paused and ready to go.

"Ready to start?" you ask Alex. They nod.

"Lights, camera, action!"

*Go to **145**.*

(131, 133)

136

"It would be like… totally swell if you just got out of here," you say. *"Seriously."*

He blinks.

"Please?"

"What time do you go to bed?" he asks.

"Excuse me?"

"I could come back then," he says.

"I… I… uh," you stammer.

"Well?" he asks.

You feel a chill in your gut. His empty eyes continue to bore into you.

Suddenly, without another word, he turns on his heel and walks away.

You watch as he goes. He doesn't head down the driveway. He takes the trail that leads into the forest. The same trail you went walking on earlier.

Your heart is hammering. A sharp spike of adrenaline makes your hands tremble.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.
*Make a **Sanity** roll: if you fail, lose 1 Sanity.*
*To follow the stranger, go to **138**.*
*To close the door and make sure it's locked, go to **120**.*

(117)

137

"I'm just going to brush my teeth before the movie," you mutter. You try to act like you just didn't hear what they said. You don't think they buy it. You catch a flash of hurt in their eyes as you shuffle back towards the bathroom with your bag. You don't feel good about it, but you can't bring yourself to lie straight to their face. You crush the feeling of guilt and remorse deep down inside and focus on what you're doing.

Once you're changed and ready for bed, you come back out and join Alex. You can hear the VCR humming.

"Ready to go?" you ask.

Alex nods. They're trying to look calm, but you can see their eyes are puffy. *"Lights, camera, action!"*

*Check/tick **Broken Heart** on the log sheet.*
*Go to **145**.*

(131, 133)

138

You step out of the cabin and watch as the stranger strides down the forest trail. You follow him, crunching along the same stones you trod on earlier this morning.

You can't help but feel like what you're doing is dangerous.

To go back to the cabin and lock the doors, go to ***120****.*
To pursue him deeper into the forest, go to ***141****.*

(119, 125, 130, 136, 140)

139

You're on the couch for a long time. You fall in and out of sleep. You try to read a little more, but the book bores you.

Eventually, you stir and blink the sleep from your eyes. The sun has set.

Heal 1 hit point if you have lost any so far.
Check/tick ***Well Rested*** *on the log sheet.*
Go to ***142****.*

(112, 128)

140

You wait a few moments, then you hear him step away from the door.

You move to the window and look out. You see him leaving. He doesn't head down the driveway. He takes the trail that leads into the forest. The same trail you went walking on earlier.

To follow the stranger, go to ***138****.*
To close the door and make sure it's locked, go to ***120****.*

(110, 128)

141

You hurry after the stranger. You follow behind him through the woods. You're not far away, but he doesn't seem to pay attention to you.

You can creep after the stranger or decide to follow him openly:

To creep after him, make a ***Stealth*** *roll; if* ***Comfortable*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, make this roll with a bonus die.*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***144****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***146****.*

If you fail but wish to ***Push the Roll****, you may roll a second time at the risk of being caught when you're too close to flee.*

- *If you succeed the pushed roll, go to* ***144****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***147****.*

To openly follow the stranger, go to ***143****.*

(138)

142

It's dark. Clouds cover the sky, and the moon is hidden.

You lay on top of the bed for a while, listening to the wind shaking the branches of the pines all around. Every few minutes, you think you hear your partner arriving back. Every time, you're wrong.

When you walk around the cabin, you use your flashlight to guide your way. After a few hours, you make yourself a sandwich and eat it in the dark.

While you chew, there is a knock on the door. It is a single knock. Suffocating silence follows it.

To ignore the knock, go to ***183****.*
To answer the door, go to ***176****.*

(120, 139, 157, 163)

143

You follow the stranger openly. You know he must hear you, but he doesn't stop to look your way. This guy had a head start, and he's a fast walker. You hurry just to keep up.

Suddenly, without warning, the stranger turns. He locks eyes with you. All is silent.

Go to ***152****.*

(141)

144

You stoop down and step carefully, avoiding sticks and branches to silence your pursuit. The man gets a little farther in front, but you don't lose sight of him.

After a few minutes, he hesitates. You bob down low. The stranger looks about over his shoulder, then steps off the forest trail and walks deeper into the woods.

To continue following him, go to ***155****.*
To turn back, go to ***163****.*

(141)

145

When the film begins, the screen is black. There is faint music but no opening credits. Then, the screen cuts to blurry footage that was clearly recorded on a hand-held camera.

"Wow, is this one of Mark's home movies?" you ask.

Alex laughs then reaches for the remote. *"Oh. I'm sorry."*

"Wait a second, that looks familiar," you say, pointing at the TV. Alex hesitates.

On screen, you see a wall of tall forest trees. Leaves and pine needles crunch under the feet of whoever's filming. The camera pans across the landscape, creating a blur of greens and browns. Suddenly, you spot Mark's cabin, standing alone in its little clearing. A dull red sedan is parked out front.

"That's Julie's car," Alex says.

"This must have been after their wedding."

The camera is shaky. Wind rushes against the microphone, causing a brief flurry of horrid scraping from the speakers. There's movement near the red car. A woman, Julie, is taking bags from the trunk. She is smiling.

"Yeah," Alex says. *"This must be at least five, six years ago."*

Julie turns as the cabin door opens. Mark steps out, walks over, and takes one of the bags from her. They smile and exchange unheard words.

You sit bolt upright. *"What the hell?"*

"What's wrong? It's only Mark."

"Yeah, so who's filming?"

Alex stammers and blinks.

On the screen, Mark and Julie go inside and close the door behind them. The camera zooms in toward the window. The picture is a grainy blur of colors. You see movement in the cabin. The camera zooms even closer. Then, harsh wind picks up and howls through the speakers. The image smashes to a slurry of loud static. White noise booms out into the room. The sound drills into your skull. You feel like it's going to make your head explode.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

Make a ***Sanity*** *roll: if you fail, lose 1 Sanity and check/tick* ***Unsettled*** *on the log sheet.*

To cover your ears, go to ***154****.*
To scramble for the dial and turn it down, go to ***158****.*

(135, 137)

146

You sneak along after the stranger. Sticks break and leaves crunch under your feet. It's impossibly loud in the silent woods. A particularly loud crack makes you curse reflexively. Whoops. You clamp a hand over your mouth but it's already too late. The man you're following turns and looks about. He locks eyes with you.

Go to ***152****.*

(141)

147

You try your best to be quiet. You avoid the big sticks and stay low to the ground. Then you stub your toe, curse in pain, and fall forward onto your knees, wincing.

The man turns around. He sees you. He stares in silence, and you stare back.

For a moment, you consider calling out to explain yourself. Then the man charges.

The words catch in your throat. He's really running for you. Full pelt. His eyes unblinking, hands flat and cutting through the air as they pump in time with his legs.

He's going to attack you!

You stagger up and try to back away.

Make a Hard ***DEX*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***148****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***149****.*

(141)

148

You whip about and bolt back toward the cabin as fast as you can. You suck air in quick. Your lungs are on fire.

You can barely hear the stranger's stomping footfalls just behind you over the sound of the blood pumping in your ears.

You reach the clearing where the cabin stands and risk a glance over your shoulder. You see nothing.

He's gone.

*Go to **170**.*

(147, 153)

149

You get only a few steps before he is upon you.

You fall to the ground. His arms wrap tight around your shoulders. Your face smacks against the dirt.

You struggle and strain, but his grip is like iron. You feel something wet and cold against your ear.

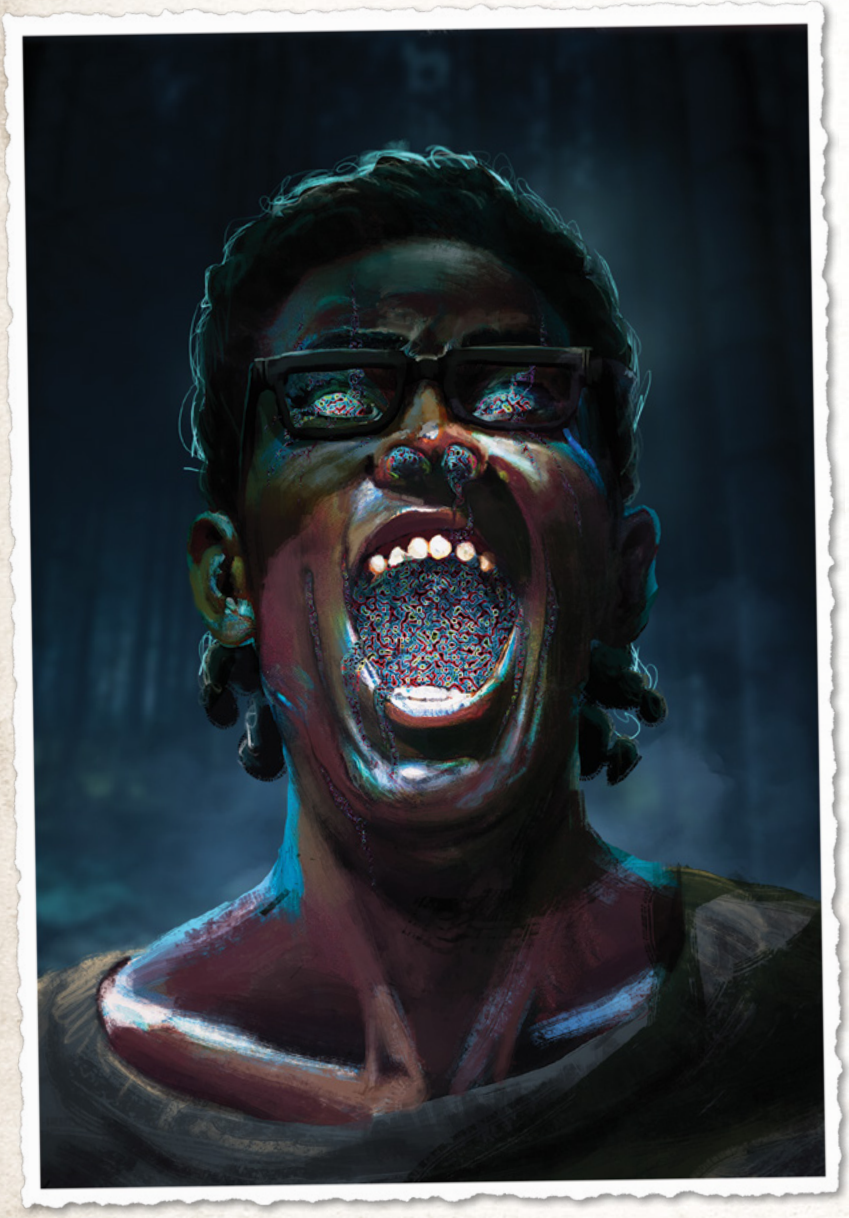
Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

Take 1D4 damage.

*Make a **Fighting (Brawl)** roll:*

- *If you fail, go to **150**.*
- *If you succeed, go to **151**.*

(147)



150

You thrash and heave, but to no avail.

You feel that cold, wet thing slither into your ear. You scream as you feel the wriggling force twist itself through your ear canal and swell inside your head. There's a pressure behind your eyes. Your vision goes black. The sounds of the world around you are overwhelmed by wailing static. Soon, there is nothing but its embrace. Nothing but the sound. Nothing but…

Nothing.

THE END.

(149)

151

You wrench yourself free of the stranger's grip, leap back to your feet, and stagger away. You bolt as fast as you can towards safety. Your lungs burn as you suck in ragged gasps of air. You can hear nothing over the sound of blood pumping in your ears.

When you finally reach the cabin, you risk a glance over your shoulder. The empty woods gaze back.

He's gone.

*Go to **170**.*

(149)

152

You both hover where you are, frozen in the stillness of the woods. The stranger's flat, empty eyes betray no emotion.

*To back down and return to the cabin, go to **163**.*
*To hold your ground, go to **153**.*

(143, 146)

153

You stare back at him. You cross your arms over your chest. You're not giving this guy the satisfaction of seeing you step down.

Then suddenly, he runs at you.

He's really running. Full pelt. His eyes unblinking, hands flat and cutting through the air as they pump in time with his legs.

He's charging straight for you.

You stumble away and try to run.

*Make a Hard **DEX** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **148**.*
- *If you fail, go to **149**.*

(152)

154

You clamp your hands hard over your ears but, somehow, the static still seeps in. Alex, next to you, does the same. Their lips are moving, but you can't tell what they're saying.

You yell something about the remote, but even your own voice is lost, hidden beneath the TV's digital wailing.

Alex pulls one hand down and fiddles with the remote. The screeching continues. Alex snarls, tosses the remote aside, then staggers over to the TV. You watch them go. The TV looks somehow reflected in the windows behind it. Pine trees stand guard in the Black Hills outside, but they're riddled with static. Riddled with static. Static. STATIC!

You clamp your eyes shut.

Alex turns the dial on the TV and kills the noise. The screen goes blank. A blaring ring lingers in your ears.

"What in the hell was that?" you ask.

Alex catches their breath for a moment, then shrugs. *"I have no idea..."*

"How the hell was it so damn loud?"

"These must be really good speakers."

You roll your eyes. *"Great. At least there's a top TV to watch a creepy peeping Tom video on."*

"Oh, c'mon. That wasn't a peeping Tom." Alex gestures to the TV cabinet. *"Why would Mark and Julie have the tape?"*

*If **Broken Heart** is checked on the log sheet, you cannot stay calm. You must go to **160**.*
*To get frustrated with Alex, go to **160**.*
*To stay calm, go to **174**.*

(145)

155

The night keeps getting darker.

You follow the stranger between shadowy pine trees. The forest floor quietly crunches beneath your feet. He still hasn't seen you.

He leads you down the side of the Black Hills, into a narrow valley where the forest floor plateaus, and pine-coated ridges rise around you in all directions.

The sun slowly starts to dip below the lip of the horizon. The shadows around you lengthen.

*To continue following, go to **164**.*
*To head back to the cabin, go to **156**.*

(144)

156

It's too dangerous to keep stalking after this weirdo into the depths of the forest. You turn around and try to find your way back to the cabin.

*Make a **Navigate** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **157**.*
- *If you fail, go to **159**.*

*If you fail but wish to **Push the Roll**, you may roll a second time at the risk being lost in the cold for longer:*

- *If you succeed the pushed roll, go to **157**.*
- *If you fail the pushed roll, go to **162**.*

(155)

157

It takes longer than you expected, but you finally find your way back to the forest trail, then back to Mark's cabin. By the time you do, the sun has all but set.

You can't help but feel as if you've narrowly evaded some terrible danger.

*Go to **142**.*

(156)

158

You dart from the bed, grimacing at the ear-splitting noise. You switch the dial and kill the TV.

Alex is sitting on the bed with their hands clamped over their ears like a dope. *"Sorry, it's only a remote for the VCR. There's no volume control."*

"What the hell was that?" you ask angrily.

Alex shrugs. *"I dunno."*

"Mark and Julie came out here with someone else?"

Alex laughs. *"I don't really wanna think about what your brother and his wife might get up to when they're out here."*

You roll your eyes. *"That was creepy. It was like a peeping Tom."*

"Well, we know it's not." Alex gestures to the TV cabinet. *"Why would Mark and Julie have the tape?"*

*If **Broken Heart** is checked on the log sheet, you cannot stay calm. You must go to **160**.*

*To get frustrated with Alex, go to **160**.*

*To stay calm, go to **174**.*

(145)

159

It's dark, and getting darker. You see nothing but stones, rocks, and trees all around. It's also getting colder. Your teeth chatter, creating some dull comfort as your shiver. Muscles you didn't know you had tweak and thrum in a desperate attempt to stay warm.

It takes an age, and the cold is harrowing, but eventually you make your way back to the trail. From there, you make it back to the cabin.

It's dark when you arrive. You cannot wait to get back inside.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

*Make a **CON** roll. If **Touched by Cold** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, do so with a penalty die. If **Practical** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, do so with a bonus die. If both are checked/ticked, make the roll without modification. If you fail, take 1D4 damage.*

*Go to **170**.*

(156)

Moonlit Woods

160

You sigh. *"Whatever. You always know best, right?"*

Alex frowns. *"What's that supposed to mean?"*

You remember the car ride up. How Alex left you to do all the work while they daydreamed and stared out the window. *"Never mind,"* you say, then roll over in bed. *"Can you get the light?"*

"You don't wanna watch a movie anymore?"

"No," you say, turning your back to Alex. *"I just want to sleep."*

Alex sighs. *"Fine."* You feel the bed shift as they stand. *"I just think that—"*

The TV set blares to life again. It bellows static through the cabin. Thunderous scraping and coughing bounces off the walls. You thrash and cover your ears. Alex swears but you can hardly hear it. The noise builds to a frenetic peak. It's almost unbearable. Then, just as quick as it began, the noise stops. The TV falls silent. All the lights in the cabin go dead.

Check/tick ***Blame Game*** *on the log sheet.*

Go to ***193****.*

(154, 158)

161

It takes an age, and the cold is deathly, but eventually you make your way back to the trail, then from there, back to the cabin.

It's dark when you arrive. You cannot wait to get back inside.

Go to ***170****.*

(162)

162

Everything looks the same. You walk for an hour, longer even. You're not sure how much time has passed, but it feels like an age. The cold sets in. It bites. Your teeth chatter and you shiver uncontrollably as you stumble on.

Panic sets in.

The woods are becoming black as pitch and your eyes are straining to make out the sight of the trees around you. The looming canopy high above blocks out any moonlight from guiding your way.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

Make a ***CON*** *roll. If* ***Touched by Cold*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, do so with a penalty die. If* ***Practical*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, do so with a bonus die. If both are checked/ticked, make the roll without modification. If you fail, take 1D6 damage.*

Go to ***161****.*

(156)

163

You decide to quit while you're ahead.

You hurry back. You hear no sound of pursuit behind you. Before long, you're back inside the cabin, where it's safe.

Go to ***142****.*

(144, 152)

164

You continue to follow. The sun sets and it grows dark. Finally, the stranger walks into a small clearing. In the center, there is a mound of freshly turned earth.

You watch from the tree line. He stands in the middle of the clearing, hidden by long shadows. His hands hang by his sides.

"You shouldn't have come here," he says. You seize up.

The man turns slowly and looks at you.

"You're not supposed to be here."

To ask him what he means, go to ***172****.*

To tell him you're sorry and you'll leave, go to ***165****.*

(155)

165

"Sorry," you say, stepping out from the trees. *"I'm sorry. I'll go now, okay? I'll leave."*

He shakes his head. *"It's too late for that."*

"No, it's not," you say. *"I'm going now. I'll just go back to my cabin and forget all this."*

He stares at you.

"Okay?"

He opens his mouth and opens it wide. The teeth at the back of his throat are black. He sticks his tongue out. It's broad and flat.

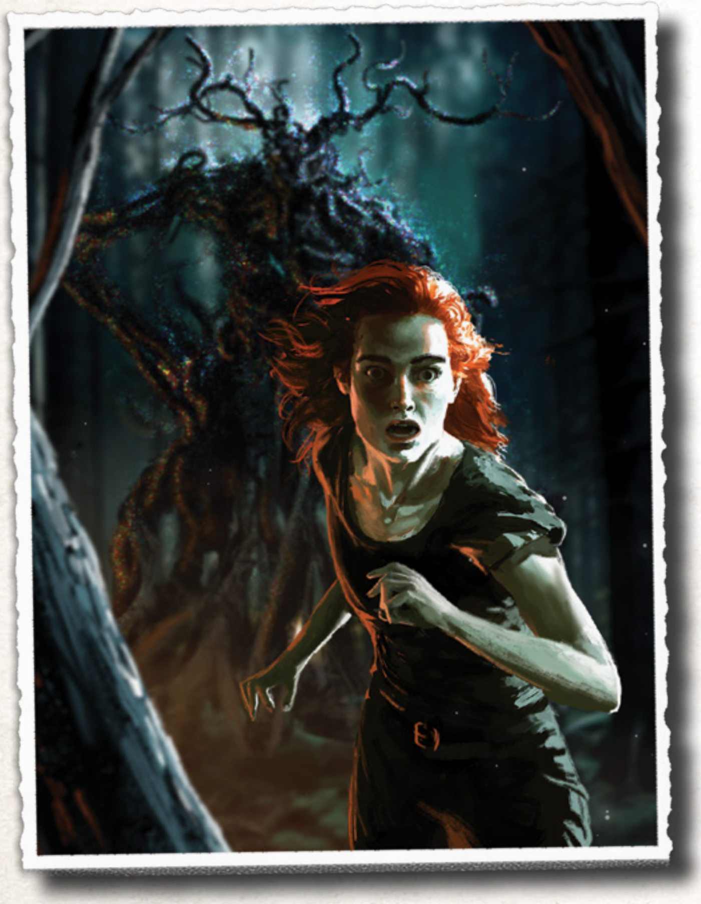
He screams, and when he does, he bellows. The sound is harrowing. It's not a regular scream. It's an amalgam of human bellowing and a howling static that wracks at your brain, impossibly loud.

Check/tick ***Wrong Turn*** *on the log sheet.*

Make a ***Sanity*** *roll:*

- *If you fail, go to* ***166****.*
- *If you succeed, go to* ***173****.*

(164)



166

You clamp your hands over your ears. Your scream joins the sound of wailing static.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

Lose 1D4 Sanity and take 1D4 damage.

To run, go to ***167****.*

To succumb, go to ***171****.*

(165, 172)

167

No. No! You stumble away clutching at your head and make for the tree line. A terrible sharp pain blossoms in the base of your skull. It makes your vision blur. You reach the trees and stagger blindly into the woods.

Make a ***Navigate*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***168****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***169****.*

(166, 173, 175)

168

Hands still clamped around your head, you run as fast as you can for safety. You can feel blood leaking from your ears, pooling in your hands as you go. You dash past trees, jump over logs, and duck under branches.

Acting totally on instinct, you manage to pick out the path you took and follow it back. It takes longer than you expected, but you finally find your way back to the forest trail, then back to Mark's cabin. It stands serenely in the dark. There is still no car in the driveway.

Go to ***170****.*

(167)

169

Hands still clamped around your head, you run as fast as you can for safety. You can feel blood leaking from your ears, pooling in your hands as you go.

You reach the tree line and stumble into the dark. After just a few steps you're lost.

You sprint until you're exhausted, then collapse against a fallen log. The sound of rising static from behind you drives you to your feet again and you keep running. For hours, you follow the same pattern. Run. Stop. Run. Stop. Panic and the freezing cold saps your strength. You struggle to keep going. It's only by blind luck that, after what feels like hours, you stumble onto a familiar walking trail, and make your way back to the cabin. It stands serenely in the dark. There is still no car in the driveway.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

Make a ***CON*** *roll: if* ***Touched by Cold*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, do so with a penalty die. If* ***Practical*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, do so with a bonus die. If both are checked/ticked, make the roll without modification. If you fail, take 1D4 damage.*

Go to ***170****.*

(167)

170

You make it into the cabin and slam the door shut. Once you're sure it's locked, you slide down the wall and sit, head cradled in your hands. You're shaking. That was awful. Utterly, unspeakably awful. Now what? What the heck are you meant to do?

Seconds drag by, then minutes, then hours. You stay hidden in the cabin. You prowl through it, peeking outside every now and again, but there's no sign of your partner, and no sign of danger either. You think about making a break for it out into the woods, but you know that the stranger is probably just outside watching, waiting for you to try. You feel lost…

Then, suddenly, the TV turns on.

Maybe the power's back?

To start turning on lights, go to ***184****.*

To inspect the television, go to ***185****.*

(148, 151, 159, 161, 168)

171

Your brain short circuits. The panic overwhelming you vanishes in an instant. This is it. This is where you belong.

You fall to your knees. You look up. You take your hands from your ears, and they're coated with blood.

Nothing but the static surrounds you now. It's replaced the cold, the fear, the uncertainty of your future.

You see her, before you. Erupting from the man's larynx. He has fallen to his knees, and she has pulled herself free, wicked and dripping with howling static. She is perfect.

She lifts you high into the sky. You feel your limbs free from the earth.

Her mouth covers your head and you're taken into her. You feel her barbs pierce your flesh, and tentacles slide past your lips, into your mouth, and down your throat to fill your guts.

Blood runs in rivulets down your face, then all is black.

Only the static remains.

You can't stop smiling.

THE END.

(166, 175)

172

"What're you talking about?" you ask. You spin your head from side to side, taking in the scene before you. *"What is this place?"*

The stranger stares back at you wordlessly.

"Well?" You look past him, at the mound of overturned earth. *"What is that?"*

He stares.

You stare back.

Then, he opens his mouth. Opens it wide. The teeth at the back of his throat are black. He sticks his tongue out. It's broad and flat.

He screams, and when he does, he bellows. The sound is harrowing. It's not a regular scream. It's a howling cacophony that warps, merges, and becomes a withering static that wracks at your brain, impossibly loud.

Make a ***Sanity*** *roll:*

- *If you fail, go to* ***166****.*
- *If you succeed, go to* ***173****.*

(164, 167)

173

You clamp your hands over your ears. You wince. You can feel the static in your head. Blood drips from inside your ears, pooling in the palms of your hands.

Whatever this is, it's horrendous, confounding, but somehow tempting. It's like there is a voice hidden in the static. A voice you cannot quite hear.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

Take 1 damage.

To try and run, go to ***167****.*

To remove your hands from your ears, just for a moment, so you can hear what the voice is saying, go to ***175****.*

(165, 172)

174

You shake your head and take a deep breath. *"You're right. It's stupid. Let's just forget about… whatever the hell that was."*

"You still wanna watch a movie?" Alex asks.

"Sure. Whatever is fine. One of those schlocky flicks…," you say.

Alex gets up. *"My pick?"*

"Your pick."

Alex smiles and looks over the tapes in the cabinet. *"Ooh! This is a good one."* You lean forward to look at a tape that has a guy wearing a pumpkin on his head on the cover. *"I think even you'll like it, babe."*

"Somehow, I doubt it." You smile.

"No, seriously," Alex says, and slips the tape from the case. *"It's about this guy who's a writer, and he drives up to this secluded town in Maine, right?"* Alex hits *eject* on the VCR. *"And anyway, when he—"*

The TV set blares to life. It bellows static through the cabin. Thunderous scraping and coughing bounces off the walls.

You thrash and cover your ears. Alex is swearing but you can barely hear it.

The TV falls silent, and with it all the lights in the cabin go dark.

The power is out.

Go to ***193****.*

(154, 158)

175

Your hand slips off your ear for the briefest of seconds. In that time the static amplifies tenfold. You feel the sound burrowing into your head, like icy fingers wracking through your brain and scraping at the inside of your skull.

Tears stream down your face. You scream but cannot hear yourself. Your wails join the sound of screeching static.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

Lose 1D4 Sanity and take 1D4 damage.

To try to run, go to ***167****.*

To succumb, go to ***171****.*

(173)

176

You set the sandwich aside and swallow. You walk to the door, the flashlight guiding your way.

"Hello?" you ask.

You open the door.

Darkness.

The flashlight spreads a cone of dim light out into the night. The wind and the cold wash over you.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

Make a ***Sanity*** *roll; if you fail, lose 1 Sanity.*

If ***Lumberjack*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you spot an item you found, you must go to* ***177****.*

To dismiss the noise as an accident of the wind, go to ***181****.*

To wait a moment longer, go to ***178****.*

(142)

177

You stand in the open door for a moment, leaning out of the cabin. You see the firewood pile nearby, as well as the axe you found earlier, resting against the cabin door.

Suspicion, paranoia, or some combination of the two compel you to act. You take the axe and place it by the door inside the cabin.

Check/tick ***Close to Hand*** *on the log sheet.*

To go back inside and lock the door, go to ***182****.*

(176)

178

It's cold and the wind is picking up and it's louder out here than you realized. You can't make out any individual sounds, it's just one long howl.

It sounds like solid white noise, like howling, screeching static.

*Make a **Sanity** roll:*

- *If you fail, go to **179**.*
- *If you succeed, go to **180**.*

(176)

179

Static. Static. Howling static. In the trees and on the ground. In your face and down your throat. In your gut and in your eyes. Howling, howling, howling. Meshy, white, howling STATIC. You hurry back inside.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.
Lose 1 Sanity.
*Go to **181**.*

(178)

180

Unpleasantness. Coldness. You see nothing else.

At least, nothing worth thinking too hard on.

You head back inside.

*Go to **181**.*

(179)

181

You close the door. You didn't realize how cold it was until the slight warmth of the cabin returns.

You go back to the kitchen and sit dejectedly before what is left of your sandwich.

Later, you follow the flashlight back to the bed and get under the covers, rubbing your arms and legs to stay warm.

Upon the cabinet at the foot of the bed, the television turns on. The power is back!

*To start turning on lights, go to **184**.*
*To inspect the television, go to **185**.*

(176, 179, 180)

182

You shut the door and make sure it is locked. You even shove against it to make sure it won't budge. It doesn't. Feeling safer now, you walk back into the center of the room. You wait. Time drifts by. The night grows longer. The cabin gets colder.

Eventually, you use the flashlight to head back to the bed and get under the covers, rubbing your arms and legs to stay warm.

Upon the cabinet at the foot of the bed, the television turns on.

Maybe the power's back?

*Check/tick **Lockdown** on the log sheet.*
*To start turning on lights, go to **184**.*
*To turn off that awful TV, go to **185**.*

(177)

183

You finish your sandwich and put the plate in the sink. There is no further knock at the door. You were right. It must just have been something tossed at the cabin, brought on by the wind.

As the night goes on, it gets colder. You use the flashlight to go back to the bed and get under the covers.

On the cabinet at the foot of the bed, the television turns on. The power is back!

*To turn on a light, go to **184**.*
*To turn off that awful TV, go to **185**.*

(142)

184

You reach across to the bedside lamp and flick the switch. Nothing.

You get out of bed and use the flashlight to find the light switch on the wall. Nothing.

You cross the cabin and step into the bathroom. You flick the switch. Nothing.

Nothing.

Just the TV, tuned to the VCR, displaying slightly illuminated black.

*To inspect the TV, go to **186**.*

(170, 181, 182, 183)

185

You hurry over to the television. You hit the power button.

Nothing changes.

The screen remains tuned to the VCR, displaying slightly illuminated black.

*Go to **186**.*

(170, 181, 182, 183)

186

It's quiet. The VCR is purring. The TV is dim.

Depending on your choices, you may return to this entry several times. Select an option you have not already chosen:

*If **The Quiet in the Evening** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you must go to **187**.*

*Or, if **The Couple Who Came to the Cabin** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, go to **196**.*

*To play the tape from last night, go to **208**.*

*To leave the TV alone, go to **223**.*

(184, 185, 187, 188, 191, 192, 194, 195, 196, 198, 199, 201, 203, 204, 206, 214, 216, 220, 221)

187

You produce the tape you found in the dilapidated shed. The title, written in black marker pen on the label, reads: *The Quiet in the Evening*.

You take the tape to the television set and sit on your knees to reach the VCR.

*To play the tape, go to **188**.*

*To change your mind and put the tape away, go back to **186**.*

(186)

188

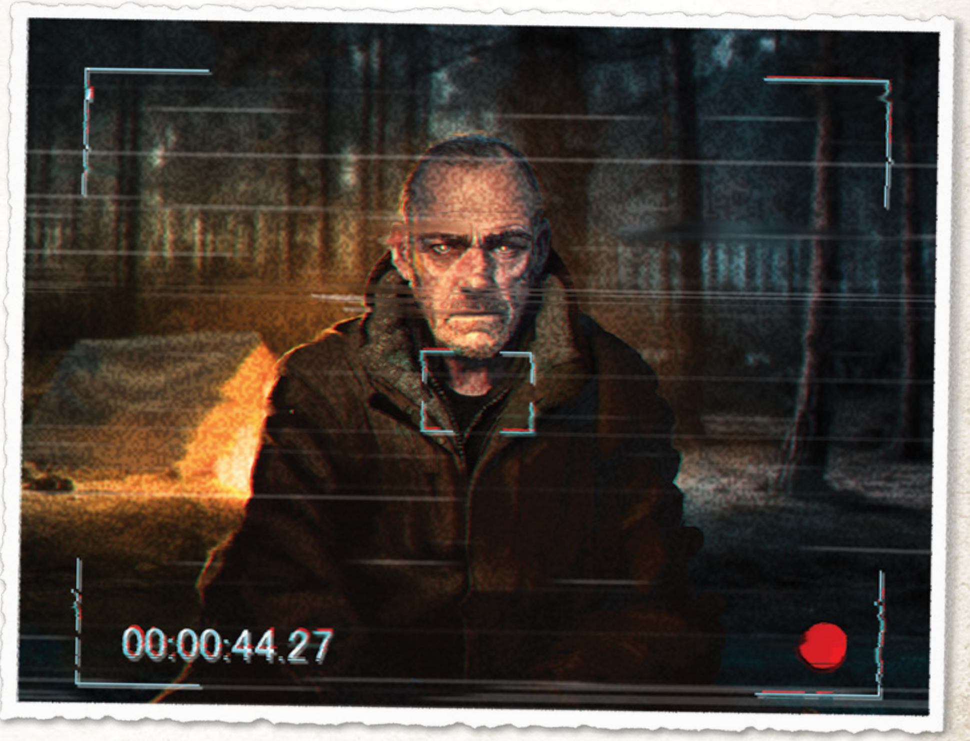
You insert the tape and press play.

The screen flutters for a moment. Then, the sounds of the forest come in. This tape looks to have also been made with a hand-held camcorder.

The person recording is looking at a campfire. Flames are licking around a wet log. The sizzle and crack of wood merges with the rustle of surrounding trees.

After a few moments of this, you hear a voice. It's a man's voice with a strange sing-song tone that reminds you of adult presenters on kid's television.

The Recording



"It's so nice and quiet here at night," the voice says. You're pretty sure it belongs to whoever is holding the camera. *"Alone with my thoughts. Not a care in the world, I must say!"* The banality of this lonely self-talk creeps you out.

The camera jolts to the left. It is now centered on the tree line, right on the edge of the light from the fire where the forest plunges into darkness.

"Hello?" the man says.

There is nothing but the quiet crackling of the fire.

"Hello?" He stands up. He walks closer to the forest. *"Is someone out there?"*

Faintly, somewhere in the dark, you hear the muted sound of shouting.

"What did you say?" the cameraman calls.

Again, the muted sounds of yelling.

The cameraman stands staring into the dark for a few moments longer. Then, hastily, he turns the camera down to face his boot-clad feet, strides back to his camp, and crawls into his tent. Panting, he quickly zips the entrance flap up.

The tape ends.

*To rewind the tape and raise the volume to try and hear the muted voice, go to **189**.*

*To eject the tape, go back to **186**.*

(187)

189

You rewind the tape, watching as the images flash in reverse before you. You stop at the part where the man turns the camera toward the forest. You crank the volume to max.

"—ello?" the man says.

You hear a very quiet voice, yelling out in the dark.

"Hello?" He stands up. He walks closer to the forest. *"Is someone out there?"*

*Make a **Listen** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **190**.*
- *If you fail, go to **192**.*

*If you fail but wish to **Push the Roll**, you may roll a second time at the risk of hearing something you wish you hadn't:*

- *If you succeed the pushed roll, go to **190**.*
- *If you fail the pushed roll, go to **195**.*

(188)

190

You strain your ears. The reply is faint, made in a haggard voice. *"It's eating me!"*

"What did you say?" the cameraman calls back.

Again, the haggard, horrid, screaming voice replies, *"It's EATING me!"*

The cameraman stands staring into the dark for just a few moments longer. Then, hastily, he turns the camera down to face his boot-clad feet and strides back to his camp and crawls into his tent. You hear the distant voice call out one last time.

"Help me! It's everywhere! I can't hea—"

The tape ends.

*Make a **Sanity** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **191**.*
- *If you fail, go to **194**.*

(189)

191

You feel a cold knot in your stomach. You swallow against it. You eject the tape. You manage to hold yourself together, but only just.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

Lose 1 Sanity.

*Go to **186**.*

(190)

192

"Hello?" the cameraman calls out.

There is nothing but the quiet crackling of the fire.

"Hello?" He stands up. He walks closer to the forest. *"Is someone out there?"*

You catch the same muffled response. It's hardly perceptible.

"What did you say?" the cameraman calls back.

This time, you don't even hear the faint sound of the second response. This is no use. It's far too quiet. You can't make anything out.

Disappointed, you eject the tape.

*Go to **186**.*

(189)

193

"Alex?" you ask the darkness.

"Yeah?"

"What was that?"

"I think the power's out."

You hear scrambling in the darkness as Alex shuffles along the floor, one hand touching the wall. They flick the light switch several times.

"I thought this place was on solar power?"

"That's what they said. Maybe something is broken."

"Do you think there's a backup?"

"No idea. I guess we'll need to go into town tomorrow and call Mark to ask him."

"Great." You press your fists against your brow. *"That's just great."*

Your heart is still racing after that last burst of noise. You take your hands away from your face, but it doesn't get any lighter. It's pitch black in the cabin. You feel anxiety start to build in your chest.

*If either **Broken Heart** or **Blame Game** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you cannot lean on Alex for support. You must go to **207**.*

*To lean on Alex for support, go to **205**.*

*To give up and go to sleep, go to **207**.*

(160, 174)

194

Eating. Something was eating that guy. What the hell was eating him? Is it out there? Is it coming for you? Oh God. Why did you think it was a good idea to take the tape in the first place? What were you thinking?

Eating. It's eating. It's going to eat you. It will start with your feet. It's going to take little bites and make each one count.

You don't know what it is, but you know it's going to eat you.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

Lose 1D4 Sanity.

*Go to **186**.*

(190)

195

You rewind the tape to the same spot, press your ear close to the speaker, then hit play.

You hear the cameraman stand up.

"Hel-SCREEEEEECH"

You jerk your head back and cry out. Just as the cameraman begins to speak, the TV volume increases sharply. You turn the volume down as low as it can go with one hand and clamp the other over the side of your head. That was painfully loud. There's a dull ringing that remains in your ear.

*Check/tick **Tinnitus** on the log sheet.*

*Go to **186**.*

(189)

196

You take the tape you found jammed in the camcorder and look at it. Written on the side is: *The Couple Who Came to the Cabin*.

You sit down in front of the television set and put the tape into the VCR.

*To press play, go to **197**.*

*To put the tape away, go back to **186**.*

(186)

197

The tape starts. The screen shows a wooden wall. It pans around. Your stomach sinks as you realize that the screen is showing the interior of the cabin—the one you're currently in.

The person holding the camera is looking around. They pan over the bed and the TV set. Then they turn to the kitchen where a blonde woman is unpacking grocery bags.

You feel a wave of relief when you realize the woman is Julie, Mark's wife. Mark must be holding the camera.

"Hey, hot stuff," he says.

Julie looks up and laughs. *"Oh God, put that away."*

"We're here live in the Dakota Black Hills with Julie Montgomery," he says and closes in on her smiling face. *"Julie, is this your first time in the hills?"*

She rolls her eyes and continues to unpack the groceries but plays along. *"No. It's my second. I'm pretty sure you were here with me the first time, too, Reporter Mark."*

"Okay, okay." Mark steps around the kitchen table, closer to her. *"But can you confirm the rumors that you fell madly in love with a handsome member of the press during your last visit?"*

Julie shakes her head.

"No! Those rumors are unfounded!" She chuckles and bats at Mark with a brand-new stainless steel frying pan pulled from the grocery bag. Mark dodges away, giggling. Julie holds the pan up to playfully hide her face, as if avoiding the paparazzi.

"Well, Julie, we'll just have to—"

The camera swings around and looks at the cabin door.

You hear Julie off screen ask, *"Was that a knock?"*

"I think so?" Mark says. The camera drops to the side, showing an upside-down picture of Julie in the kitchen while he walks to the door and opens it. *"Can I help you?"*

You cannot see who he is talking to. All you can see is an inverted Julie, biting her nails.

"Are Alex and Charlie here?" you hear a voice ask.

"I'm sorry?" Mark says.

"Alex and Charlie. They here?"

"…No. You've got the wrong house."

"When will they be here?"

"They… they won't be here. I'm sorry, who are you?"

Silence. Julie backs into the kitchen, away from the door.

"Hey," Mark says. *"Come ba—"*

The tape ends.

Make a ***Sanity*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***198****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***199****.*

(196)

198

This tape is… old as heck. Julie and Mark have owned the cabin for years. If the tape is from one of their early visits, how the hell did someone know to ask about you and your partner?

There is some relief in knowing that the camcorder you found clearly belonged to Mark, so that shed must be his, too.

But who the hell was asking after you?

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

Lose 1 Sanity.

To rewatch the tape and look for more clues, go to ***200****.*

To eject the tape and put it away, go back to ***186****.*

(197)

199

Who the hell was here asking after you? Was this years ago? It doesn't make any sense. The tape came from Mark's camcorder, so is that his shed out in the woods? Why didn't he say anything about it?

It must be a coincidence, right? Just some… weird… No. It's not. Something horrid is going on, and just trying to wrap your thoughts around it hurts your brain.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

Lose 1D4 Sanity.

To rewatch the tape and look for more clues, go to ***200****.*

To eject the tape and put it away, go back to ***186****.*

(197)

200

You rewind the tape and try to hold back the borderline panic threatening to overwhelm you. When you hit play, Mark and Julie repeat their exaggerated pantomime once more. You stare at the action, eyes flicking across the screen, desperate to find any kind of clue.

When the camera swings towards the cabin door, you hit pause.

Make a ***Spot Hidden*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***202****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***201****.*

If you fail but wish to ***Push the Roll****, you may roll a second time at the risk of becoming paranoid:*

- *If you succeed the pushed roll, go to* ***202****.*
- *If you fail the pushed roll, go to* ***203****.*

(198, 199)

201

Your eyes dance over the pixelated footage. You lean closer, studying, listening, looking for anything that might be hidden in there.

But there's nothing. If there is another secret hidden inside the tape, you can't figure it out.

Eventually, dejected, you eject the tape.

Go back to ***186****.*

(200)

202

When you hit pause as the door swings open, something catches your eye. You rewind the tape just a few seconds.

Mid conversation, just as Julie is hiding her face with the frying pan, a strange shape passes over the screen.

The frying pan is stainless steel. It's polished and bright. You can see the contorted image of Mark in the reflection of the pan. He's holding the camera.

You can also see a reflection of the window by the door. It's sunny outside. In the window stands a sinister black shape. It's a looming head and set of shoulders. There's horrid hair covering it. Thick branches like thorny brambles sprout from the silhouette's head. The reflection is warped. You can't tell what it is, but you're convinced it's not human.

It's just black. Featureless.

Like a shadow.

A monster. A monster in the window of the cabin that you're inside right now.

*Make a **Sanity** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **204**.*
- *If you fail, go to **206**.*

(200)

203

You watch through the tape another time. Nothing. You rewind and watch again. Still nothing. You keep trying. The whir of the rewind becomes familiar as you watch a fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth time…

There is nothing there. Nothing but questions and confusion and a whole lot that doesn't make sense! You cradle your head in your hands. This is all too much.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.
Lose 1D4 Sanity.
*Go to **289**.*

(200)

204

It's okay. Don't let yourself get overwhelmed. It's going to be alright. Everything's fine. Whatever it is. Yes, it's upsetting, but it could be anything. I mean, look at how weird and monstrous Mark's own reflection is!

And besides, you know that Mark is about to go to the door and open it—if there *was* some weird, horned creature out there, he'd have seen it and freaked out. There's nothing to worry about.

Just a scary blur of film.

You stare at the image for another thirty seconds, then you eject the tape.

*Go back to **186**.*

(202)

205

"That was really loud," you say. You can hear a waver in your voice. Alex clearly does too.

"Yeah. Don't worry about it. It's fine."

You hear approaching footsteps, then the bedframe creaks as Alex crawls onto it. In the silence following the outburst from the TV, even the slightest sound rings deafeningly loud in the quiet. You feel Alex cuddle up close to you.

"I'm sorry," Alex says.

"Don't be."

"Don't worry about the TV. We'll fix it tomorrow. If not, we can just go hiking instead."

You murmur softly in agreement. Alex wraps an arm around you. You feel their breathing on the back of your neck. It slows quickly and fades into the gentle rumble of sleep. The sound is steady and calming. Before long, you drift off too. The only sound that disturbs you is the faint creaking of pines echoing softly through the Black Hills.

*Go to **34**.*

(193)

206

Christ. What is that thing?

You stand up and walk to the window. You look outside into the dark, but you can't see a thing. You draw the curtains closed, then you walk to the window by the bed, and shut the curtains there too.

You force down bile. You look back at the television set. The blurry image of whatever unholy, indecipherable creature was captured seems like it's staring through that cabin window—through that television screen—directly at you.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.
Lose 1D4 Sanity.
Go back to ***186***.

(202)

207

You thump your pillow, settle into it, and try to get comfortable so you can sleep. Alex heads back over to the bed, hesitates, then crawls in.

"*…Babe?*" Alex says.

"*What?*"

"*Are you going to sleep?*"

"*What else am I supposed to do? The power is out and we're in the middle of the woods.*"

"*Okay, sorry.*" The bedframe creaks as Alex rolls over and faces away from you.

"*We should be able to fix the TV tomorrow.*"

"*I don't care. Let's just get some sleep.*"

"*Okay—*" Alex's voice trails off. Neither of you say anything else.

Alex doesn't stay awake long. You hear their breathing slow quickly and fade into the gentle rumble of sleep. For you, sleep comes much later. The creaking of pines, the howl of cold wind, and other strange indescribable sounds echo through the Black Hills around you. The anxiety in your chest burns as you lie silently in the dark. It's a relief when you finally fall asleep.

Check/tick ***Nyctophobe*** on the log sheet.
Go to ***34***.

(193)

208

The tape from last night is still sitting in the little cabinet. Call it morbid curiosity, or just a desire to understand what is going on, but you take up the tape and slide it into the VCR.

You turn the volume all the way down—you don't want a repeat of the speaker-blasting static from last night.

You press play.

The tape begins from where it left off the night before: static. Thunderous white noise, muted by your fingers on the volume dial.

Then, the tracking on the tape flickers—jagged white and silver lines horizontal across the tape. It looks like the tape had more footage to show when you turned it off last night.

Check/tick ***Familiar Face*** *on the log sheet.*
To adjust the tracking on the tape using the VCR controls, go to ***222***.
To let the tape play on, go to ***209***.

(186)

209

You ignore the tracking, assuming it will fix itself.

The white noise vanishes from the screen. It's replaced by the image of a clearing in the forest. Someone is adjusting the camera, presumably setting it on a tripod.

The figure finally steps into view. It's just some guy. He's wearing a fluorescent hunting jacket and beanie.

He stands back and looks at the camera, then smiles and turns to the clearing. He has set up a little campfire, and a tiny two-man tent. After nodding contentedly, the figure squats by the fire, snapping sticks in half and tossing them into the flames while looking at the camera. His lips are moving.

To adjust the volume so you can hear what the figure is saying, go to ***210***.
To continue to watch the tape muted, go to ***217***.

(208)

210

You turn the volume dial and his words become clear.

"—out five days now, I think?" He looks up and around at the pines on the edge of the clearing. *"It's beautiful. I'm expecting my friends any day now."*

The man stands up, looking down at the fire.

"Flames are keeping me warm. Keeping me prepared." He turns to the camera again, and he gestures to his tent. *"It gets cold at night. I think soon though, that won't matter."*

He moves to the tent and unzips it. He sticks his head and arms in and forages around for a few moments. He comes out of the tent holding a manilla folder, the kind you see people store documents in at offices.

He walks back to the camera and takes a seat in front of it. The frame is tight around his face. The figure looks directly down the lens, right at you. He says something but it's too soft to hear.

*To rewind the tape and turn the volume up, go to **213**.*
*To leave the tape to keep running, go to **211**.*

(209, 222)

211

Now that he is up close, you notice something weird about his face. He has a little series of pustules sprouting around the rim of his eyelid, almost directly along the same spot where his eyelashes grow. They vary in size but look sore, yellow, and wet.

*If **Veterinarian** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you remember a similar ailment, you must go to **212**.*
*Go to **215**.*

(210)

212

It looks remarkably like the deer you saw in the forest earlier that day. The same kind of sore, same kind of… strange, sickening disease. But you'd assumed it was some sort of sickness contracted by animals, not people.

Your stomach churns as the man twists and reveals the pustules in all their glory.

*Go to **215**.*

(211, 213)

213

You rewind the tape. You turn the volume up. It's uncomfortably loud. You press play.

You see the man walk back toward the camera and take a seat in front of it. He's so close you can hear his breathing. He looks directly down the lens, right at you. *"This is the blessing of the Child,"* he whispers.

Now that he is up close, you notice something weird about his eyes. He has a little series of pustules sprouting around the rim of his eyelid, almost directly along the same spot where his eyelashes grow. They vary in size but look sore, yellow, and wet.

*If **Veterinarian** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you remember a similar ailment, you must go to **212**.*
*Go to **215**.*

(210)

214

You shove your fingers in your ears and smack the stop button of the VCR with your elbow.

The cabin falls silent again. The television set sits there, glowing quietly.

You remove your hands from your ears, but your heart is still thundering in your chest. His words. How did he know those names? How did he know you?

*Go to **186**.*

(215)

215

The man holds up the folder and smiles. *"Everything here, just as yesterday. Everything I wrote down after that first dream."* He puts the folder in his lap, out of sight, and looks down. You hear the folder open and papers rustle.

"I'll read it again," he says. *"Words that came to me. In my sleep."* He smiles at the camera, proud, and gestures to the clearing behind him. *"This exact spot. I saw it every night. Every. Single. Night."* He's giddy now. He looks down at his papers and begins to read. *"It comes in the face of those it has taken, those it has brought into the fold. By the light of the sun it is hidden, clad in the skin of the familiar."*

He clears his throat, then continues. *"By night it walks free, a student of the earth, a venom and cure of the forest. Drawing from deep in the soil, these Black Hills are its flesh today. Every tree is a hair. Its followers are those dictated by the rule of time: Mikhail, Homer, Olivia, Darcy."* He pauses here and points excitedly to the paper. *"That's me!"* he adds, then goes on reading: *"Markus, Charlie, Alex, Rachel, Isaac."*

Darcy pauses. He looks directly at the camera.

"Charlie?" he asks. *"Alex?"*

He leans in close to the camera. The entire screen now is just his eye, ridden with pustules.

"Are you coming home?"

The screen smashes to white noise and the room fills with crackling static.

*Make a **Sanity** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **214**.*
- *If you fail, go to **216**.*

(211, 212, 213, 217, 218)

216

The static. The static. The horrid static!

You can't escape it! You can feel it, like icy tendrils in your gut, around your throat, burrowing into your brain and stirring around all your thoughts, twisting your feelings, and eating your memories.

You reach out and slap at the VCR once, then twice. On the third time, you finally hit the eject button and the machine spits out the tape. The cabin falls silent. The television set is there, glowing quietly.

That man on the tape… how did he know those names? How did he know *you*?

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.
Lose 1D4 Sanity.
*Go to **186**.*

(215)

217

The man looks up and around at the pines on the edge of the clearing. He is still speaking. He stands, then looks down at the fire.

He turns to the camera again and gestures to his tent. In total silence, he moves over to the tent and unzips it. He sticks his head and arms in and forages around for a few moments. He comes out of the tent holding a manilla folder, the kind you see people store documents in at offices.

He walks back to the camera and takes a seat in front of it. His face is incredibly close now. He looks directly down the lens, right at you. He says something but the TV set is muted.

Now that he is this close, you notice something weird about his face. He has a little series of pustules sprouting around the rim of his eyelid, almost directly along the same spot where his eyelashes grow. They vary in size but look sore, yellow, and wet.

*If **Veterinarian** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you recognize a similar ailment, and must go to **218**.*

*To continue to watch the tape, go to **219**.*

*To rewind the video and turn the volume up so you can hear him, go to **215**.*

(209, 222)

218

The pustules on the man's eyes look remarkably like the deer you saw in the forest earlier that day. The same kind of sore, same kind of… strange, sickening disease.

You had assumed it was some sort of sickness contracted by animals, not people.

You feel your stomach churn.

*To continue to watch with the tape muted, go to **219**.*

*To turn the volume up so you can hear the man speak, go to **215**.*

(217)

219

The man smiles, holding up the manilla folder he retrieved from his tent. He places the folder in his lap, out of sight, and looks down. He is saying something.

He smiles at the camera, proud, and gestures to the clearing behind him. He's giddy now. He looks down at his papers and begins to read the words out loud.

After thirty seconds or so, he pauses and points excitedly to the paper, pointing directly at one of the lines of text. Then he returns it to his lap and continues to read.

Eventually, he pauses again, and looks up directly at the camera.

He leans in close. The entire screen now is just his eye, ridden with pustules.

Sound breaks through the muted speakers like a flood gate. The man's voice is guttural and low, and laced with static. *"Charlie? Alex? Are you coming home?"*

The screen smashes to muted white noise. A second later, the television goes black, the tape ejecting itself from the VCR.

*Make a **Sanity** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **220**.*
- *If you fail, go to **221**.*

(217, 218)

220

You back slowly away from the TV set. Something is wrong. Something is deeply wrong.

To begin with, the sound was off. You'd made sure of that. And then… how did he… Your name? Your partner's name?

None of this is okay.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

Lose 1 Sanity.

*Go back to **186**.*

(219)

221

He said your name. He said your partner's name. The noise came through even though the TV set was muted. That hideous voice… It was like a throat filled with barbed wire, white noise, and static.

You feel your heart go cold. You step back from the television.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

Lose 1D4 Sanity.

*Go to **186**.*

(219)

222

You fiddle with the track buttons, watching the jagged silvery lines drift up and off the screen. They reveal the image of a man's face, in close up. He isn't looking at the camera. He's fiddling with something beneath it.

You realize he is setting up a tripod. The camera is recording it.

He bobs down, out of frame, and you can hear him adjusting the tripod legs as the camera looks behind him, across a clearing with a campsite, into the woods.

Between the trees stands a tall, shadowy figure, pixelated but humanoid and dark.

Then it's hidden behind the guy who was fiddling with the tripod, smiling as he walks into frame. He is wearing a fluorescent hunting jacket and beanie.

He stands back and looks at the camera, then smiles and turns to the clearing. He has set up a little campfire and tiny two-man tent.

He squats by the fire, snapping sticks in half and tossing them into the flames while looking at the camera. His lips are moving.

The thing you saw between the trees is no longer there.

*To adjust the volume so you can hear what he is saying, go to **210**.*

*To continue to watch the tape muted, go to **217**.*

(208)

223

You turn away from the television set and cross over to the bed. You sit down and try to avoid looking at it. You can hear it humming, ever so softly.

To head to sleep, go to ***255****.*

To step out onto the porch and to look one last time for the return of your partner, go to ***224****.*

(186)

224

You follow your flashlight beam to the cabin door and open it.

It's dark and cold outside. The wind drifts past the clearing in front of the cabin, down the driveway to the road hidden by the forest.

You shine the flashlight left, then right. There's no sign of your partner.

You were obviously being optimistic. If there were any cars out here, you'd hear them a mile out.

Make a ***Listen*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***225****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***228****.*

(223)

225

You hear rapidly approaching footsteps. They're getting closer fast. You spin about and raise your flashlight. It falls on the shadow of a man running in your direction from the tree line. Your eyes widen as you make him out. Middle aged, large jacket, face set into a determined snarl, he is sprinting for you with murder in his eyes.

To yell at him to stop, go to ***233****.*

To dart inside and close the door, go to ***226****.*

(224, 292)

226

Your feet skid on the wooden decking as you dive for the door. The sprinting figure is right behind you. Can you make it in time?

Make a ***DEX*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***227****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***230****.*

If you fail but wish to ***Push the Roll****, you may roll a second time at the risk of losing your footing and falling:*

- *If you succeed the pushed roll, go to* ***227****.*
- *If you fail the pushed roll, go to* ***231****.*

(225)

227

You lunge back into the cabin and slam the door shut, hastily locking it.

A half-second later, you hear the stranger slam his full weight against the cabin door. The collision is loud. The door shudders beneath him as he begins to beat his fists hard against it. The door begins to shake. He's trying to break in.

To try to secure the door, go to ***237****.*

To find something to defend yourself with, go to ***241****.*

To try and hide, go to ***239****.*

(226, 233)

228

You hear nothing. You see nothing. Your partner hasn't made it back. Hopefully, they're held up somewhere and will arrive at some point during the night. Still, you can't help but fear the worst.

You go back inside and close the door behind you. A half-second later, something slams against it. The collision is loud. The door shudders. You hear a roar of anger and the sound of fists beating against wood. The wooden doorframe begins to splinter. Someone is screaming bloody murder and trying to get inside.

To try and secure the door, go to ***237****.*

To grab something to defend yourself with, go to ***241****.*

To try and hide, go to ***239****.*

(224, 292)

229

"It has to be worth it," you say. *"Please. Please, Alex! It has to be."* Alex's face remains impassive. Then, they shake their head.

"I don't believe you, Charlie," Alex says. *"But don't worry. You don't need to trust me yet. You will eventually. Let me show you."*

They loom closer toward you.

*If **Arrival** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, a horrible image flashes into your mind, go to **50**.*

*Go to **248**.*

(277)

230

You lunge into the cabin and try to pull the door shut. It's only halfway closed when he slams into it. His arm wedges between the door and the frame, keeping it open. The trapped limb swipes wildly at you.

*To try and slam the door against his arm, go to **235**.*

*To let go of the door and try something else, go to **236**.*

(226, 233)

231

You try to slam the door shut and get inside, but you're not fast enough.

The man collides with the door and the impact sends you flying back onto the floor. You land on the ground, dazed.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

*Take **1** damage and make a **Luck** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **326**.*
- *If you fail, go to **232**.*

(226, 233)

232

Your flashlight skitters out of your hands and slides across the cabin floor into the kitchen.

The man opens the cabin door. You hear his footsteps running at you in the dark.

You scramble for the light, but you feel the stranger's hands grasp around you. His grip is like iron. You hear him grunting, sing-song moaning, like some demented elephant or horse. He is trying to drag you out of the cabin.

*To fight back, go to **282**.*

*To succumb, go to **278**.*

(231)

233

"Hey!" you call out. *"Stop right there!"*

He doesn't stop.

"Stop!" you shout, louder.

He is nearly at the door.

*Make a **DEX** roll with a penalty die:*

- *If you succeed, go to **227**.*
- *If you fail, go to **230**.*

*If you fail but wish to **Push the Roll**, you may roll a second time at the risk of losing your footing and falling:*

- *If you succeed the pushed roll, go to **227**.*
- *If you fail the pushed roll, go to **231**.*

(225)

234

"Hey, do you want to watch a movie?" you ask.

Alex hesitates. The two of you used to fall asleep to movies almost every night when you were first dating. Alex chews the idea over for a moment, then nods.

"Sure."

You take the dishes over to the sink and wash them up while Alex brushes their hair. When you're done, you head over to the TV unit.

It's a relatively cheap model from the late 80s sitting on top of a dusty VCR player. You switch both on, then open a cabinet beneath, looking for videos.

"Mark sure likes scary movies," you say, looking over the titles. Fifteen different tapes, and you're sure that covers pretty much every major slasher film of the last decade. *"God, none of these looks good."*

"There aren't any comedies?" Alex asks from the bathroom.

*Make a **Spot Hidden** roll:*

- *If you succeed the roll, go to **131**.*
- *If you fail the roll, go to **133**.*

(127, 129)

235

You open the door just a little. The arm swipes violently; the elbow twists into a vulnerable position. When it does, you slam the door hard against it. There's a hideous crack. You hear the man howl in pain.

He withdraws his arm and you're able to shut the door. You lock it hastily.

A half-second later, you hear the man slam his full weight against the cabin door. The collision is loud. The door shudders beneath him as he begins to beat his fists hard against the wood. You hear the frame begin to splinter.

*To try and secure the door, go to **237**.*
*To find something to defend yourself with, go to **241**.*
*To try and hide, go to **239**.*

(230)

236

You push away from the door and stumble back. You turn towards the main room of the cabin. In just a few seconds, you know you'll hear the door fling inward and smash hard against the interior wall.

You don't have long.

*To find something to defend yourself with, go to **241**.*
*To try and hide, go to **239**.*

(230)

237

You dart to the kitchen and grab one of the chairs. You drag it to the door and wedge it under the knob. It holds everything in place as the stranger continues to screech and smash his way inside. You can feel the walls shake with every blow. You step back, praying that the door will hold.

*Make a **STR** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **238**.*
- *If you fail, go to **246**.*

(227, 228, 235, 256, 257)

238

The chair locks in place under the door. You see the wood flex and bulge with each strike. You haven't stopped your attacker, but you've slowed them down. You glance around the cabin again and frantically reassess your options.

You have brought yourself extra time. Apply a bonus die to your next roll.

*To find something to defend yourself with, go to **241**.*
*To try and hide, go to **239**.*

(237)

239

You run across the cabin, past the bed, and into the bathroom.

You lock the bathroom door behind you and step into the tub, making yourself small and covering your mouth.

*If **Lockdown** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you **must** go to **240**.*

*Go to **254**.*

(227, 228, 235, 236, 238, 246, 256, 257)

240

You hear a crash and a ragged snarl as the stranger barges into the center of the cabin.

You squat lower in the tub and strain your ears to listen. The stranger prowls about, his feet dragging along the wooden floor. Every now and then, he howls and belts out a hoarse scream as he searches for you.

You hear him at the bathroom door. The knob turns and he pushes at the door, but it does not open.

There is a pause, and then you hear sudden footsteps retreating from the cabin.

You wait a few moments and lean out of the tub, shining the flashlight at the closed bathroom door.

There is a creak to your left. You spin about and turn the light to the bathroom window.

The stranger is standing there. He's outside, looking in. He holds your gaze with dead, flat eyes and his hands search around the window rim for an opening. He doesn't find one. He growls, then steps back and vanishes from sight.

You feel a surge of relief and thank your past self for locking the window. You're not safe yet though… You're sure he'll be back soon. What are you going to do?

To head back into the main room of the cabin, go to ***294****.*
To stay hidden in the bathroom, go to ***297****.*

(239)

241

You search around for something, anything, to defend yourself with.

If ***In Case of Emergency*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you remember a heavy weapon you found, you may go to* ***244****.*

If ***Razor Sharp*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you remember a sharp weapon you found, you may go to* ***243****.*

If ***Close to Hand*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you turn towards the axe you remembered to bring inside, go to* ***269****.*

To improvise and grab the closest thing to hand, go to ***245****.*

(227, 228, 235, 236, 238, 243, 244, 246, 256, 257)

242

Alex hugs you back. "*I know you have. Don't worry. Everything is going to be okay now. We're all together now.*" You feel Alex's hands stroking at the back of your head. You pull away. You don't have time for this right now.

"*Alex, where's the car? We must get out of here. We have to go. Now!*" Alex looks back at you sadly and shakes their head.

"*No, honey, we can't go. We must stay here.*" The way Alex speaks is all wrong. Standing closer now, you notice a thousand subtle details that don't fit with the person you know. This isn't Alex.

"*I know you're nervous,*" Alex says. "*I'd try to explain everything, but I just don't think there's much point.*" They raise their arms and open them wide. "*I'll just show you.*"

If ***Arrival*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, a horrible image flashes into your mind, go to* ***250****.*
Go to ***248****.*

(279)

243

You have a weapon! You hurry over to the pile of clothes you wore earlier on your jog, rummage through them, and draw out the long, beautiful dagger that you found in the shed this morning.

To wield the dagger, go to ***253****.*
To change your mind, go back to ***241****.*

(241)

244

You have a weapon! You hurry over to the pile of clothes you wore earlier on your jog, rummage through them, and draw out the moldy but still solid hammer that you found in the shed this morning.

To wield the hammer, go to ***249****.*
To change your mind, go back to ***241****.*

(241)

245

There's got to be something here you can use. Your eyes snap between unpacked vegetables, abandoned video tapes, and neatly folded linen.

Make a ***Spot Hidden*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***247****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***251****.*

(241, 293)

246

After just a single strike against the door, your chair slips sideways and clatters to the ground. It's not slowing anybody down. The door continues to splinter under a hail of blows. Your attacker will be inside any second.

To find something to defend yourself with, go to ***241****.*
To try and hide, go to ***239****.*

(237)

247

Instinct takes over. You sprint to the kitchen, open the drawers inside, feel around the silverware.

Your fingers close around a steak knife. It'll have to do…

You step out of the kitchen and make your stand just by the front door. You grip your steak knife tightly in one hand. After just a few seconds, the door bursts open and the stranger steps inside. He charges right at you.

Check/tick ***Last Resort*** *on the log sheet.*
Go to ***259****.*

(245)

248

"I need you, Charlie," Alex's voice says, but this time, it comes from behind you. You spin around and see that the man who crawled out of the tent, body unchanged, is now wearing Alex's face. There's two of them now. They're on either side of you.

"I need you like I needed Alex," they say, and when they speak, their voices merge, overlay, and bleed static. *"You're here now. We can be together, we three. We four. All of us. Please, come with me."*

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.
Make a ***Sanity*** *roll; if you fail, lose 1D6 Sanity.*
To agree, go to ***353****.*
To refuse, go to ***357****.*

(229, 242, 276, 281)

249

The hammer is well-weighted in your hands. You slap it against your palm, walk forward, and make your stand just by the front door. After just a few seconds, it bursts open and the stranger steps inside. He charges right at you.

Check/tick ***Blunt Force Trauma*** *on the log sheet.*
Go to ***259****.*

(244, 247)

250

A memory of flesh splitting, giving way to monstrous black tentacles, leaps into your mind. You've already seen the Child. You know what's coming next. Before you, Alex's face bulges. Pine needles sprout from their cheeks and emerge, covered in blood. Their mouth opens and a thick fleshy tentacle laced with pale blue veins and coated in saliva unfurls.

You hear Alex's voice screaming. *"The Child is given form! From its flesh, the blade of rite has drawn out a true manifestation!"* A dozen more voices join the noise. They're laughing, shrieking, and crying. They're chanting something, a name? They repeat it again and again: *"Ush-Tik-a! Ush-Tik-a!"*

Alex steps closer, clothing sloughs away from their body as their chest spills open into a sphincter-like maw, from which echoes a horrid swarming hail of static.

To run, go to ***358****.*
To fight, go to ***355****.*

(242, 276)

251

How can there be nothing in this cabin you can use as a weapon? You dash back and forth but fail to lay your hands on anything remotely useful.

Go to ***252****.*

(245)

252

You're out of time.

The cabin door splinters open. A burly figure darts through and charges in your direction.

In a panic, you drop your flashlight, and it skids across the cabin floor. You drop and try to grab it, but you're too slow. In the darkness, you feel the stranger's hands grasp around you. His grip is like iron. You hear him grunting, sing-song moaning, like some demented elephant or horse.

He is trying to drag you out of the cabin.

*To fight back, go to **282**.*
*To succumb, go to **278**.*

(251)

253

You grip the hilt of the ornate dagger. It feels powerful. *You* feel powerful.

You make your stand just by the door, brandishing the knife. You're ready.

A few seconds later, the door bursts open and the stranger steps through. He charges right at you.

*Check/tick **Knife to a Gunfight** on the log sheet.*
*Go to **259**.*

(243)

254

You hear a ragged snarl as the stranger stalks into the center of the cabin.

You squat lower in the tub and strain your ears to listen. The stranger prowls about, his feet dragging along the wooden floor. Every now and then, he howls and belts out a hoarse scream as he searches for you.

You hear him at the bathroom door. The knob turns and he pushes at the door, but it does not open.

There is a pause, and then you hear sudden footsteps retreating from the cabin.

You wait a few moments and lean out of the tub, shining the flashlight at the closed bathroom door.

There is a creak to your left. You spin about and turn the light to the bathroom window.

The stranger is standing there. He's outside, looking in. He holds your gaze with dead, flat eyes and his hands search around the window rim for an opening. He finds a latch, pulls it open, and then still holding your gaze, begins to drag himself through the window into the bathroom.

*To attack him while he is part-way through the window, go to **287**.*
*To run back to the main room, go to **293**.*

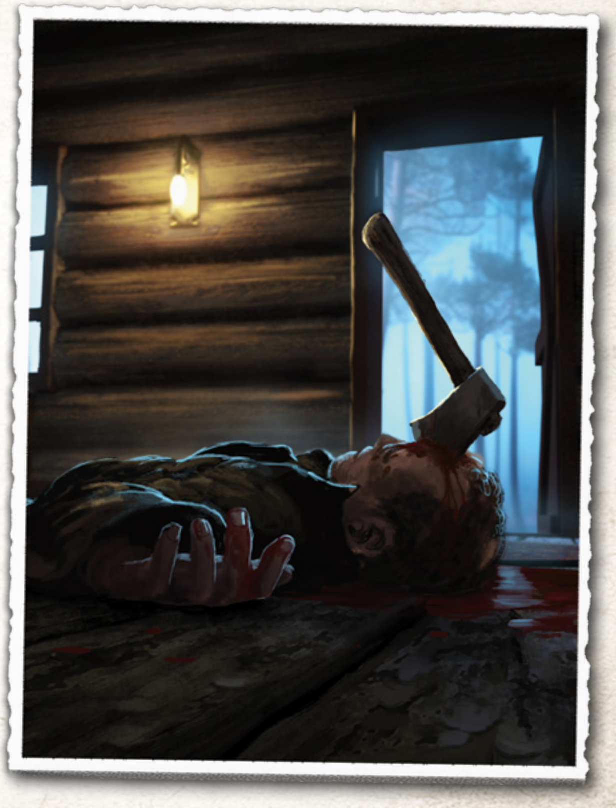
(239)

255

You crawl under the covers without bothering to get changed. At least here it is warm. You set the flashlight by the side of the bed and switch it off. Then, you curl up around your pillow, listening to the sound of the wind outside, and wait to fall asleep.

*If **Lockdown** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you must go to **256**.*
*To sleep, go to **258**.*

(223)



Opposite: The Battle
Right: The Aftermath

256

A thump at the cabin door startles you awake. You hadn't been asleep long.

You fumble for the flashlight and switch it on. You draw the light to the cabin door. It sits there, still locked, just as you left it.

The door suddenly shudders with another violent bang. You hear a hoarse grunt just before the impact. Someone on the other side—a man, by the sounds of it—is yelling, incomprehensibly. He is pounding against the door again and again. It shudders under his weight. The doorframe is slowly beginning to split.

To call out to him, go to ***257****.*
To hide, go to ***239****.*
To find something to defend yourself with, go to ***241****.*
To brace the door so it stays shut, go to ***237****.*

(255)

257

"*Who's there?*" you cry.

The man outside screeches wordlessly in reply. He thrashes more violently against the door. The hinges begin to creak. The lock bulges. He's going to break down that door any second now.

To hide, go to ***239****.*
To find something to defend yourself with, go to ***241****.*
To brace the door so it stays shut, go to ***237****.*

(256)

258

You wake.

You're not sure how long you were asleep. But it's cold.

You sit up, and even in the darkness, you can see that the cabin door is wide open. You must not have locked it.

You take the flashlight from the bedside table. You swing your legs out of bed and stand up. You turn on the light to guide you to the open door.

The flashlight lands on a man standing in the kitchen. He is haggard and breathing heavy, eyes wide. You almost drop your light in shock.

"*What the hell?*" You gasp, half in anger, half in terror.

The man doesn't answer. He screeches at the top of his lungs and lunges at you.

Go to ***259****.*

(255)

259

The stranger is bigger than you. He is crazed, wild, and violent.

He thrashes with empty hands at the air around him as he crosses the room in large, rapid strides, closing the distance.

To try and get out of the way, go to ***262****.*
To attack him as he approaches, go to ***260****.*

(249, 253, 258, 269)

260

You lash out at the stranger.

Make a ***Fighting (Brawl)*** *roll; if* ***Red Handed*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, your wound adds a penalty die to the roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***261****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***274****.*

(259, 295)

261

The stranger is deranged and dangerous, but you're strong, skillful, lucky, or a combination of all three. You land a solid strike.

*If **Last Resort** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you must go to **267**.*
*Or, if **Blunt Force Trauma** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you must go to **268**.*
*Or, if **Knife to a Gunfight** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you must go to **271**.*
*Or, if **Overkill** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you must go to **273**.*
*To slam your fist into the stranger's jaw, go to **270**.*

(260)

262

You weave sideways and try to slip out of the stranger's reach.

*Make a **Dodge** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **263**.*
- *If you fail, go to **272**.*

(259, 295)

263

You duck under the stranger's wildly swinging fists. He stumbles past you, carried by the force of his blow, and almost tumbles over the bed. You end up behind him, just by the open cabin door.

*To make a run for it, go to **298**.*
*To attack him from behind, go to **264**.*

(262)

264

The stranger is unbalanced, and you have the better position. You lunge forward and attack.

*Make a **Fighting (Brawl)** roll and add a bonus die to the roll; if **Red Handed** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, your wound adds a penalty die, (canceling out the bonus die):*

- *If you succeed, go to **265**.*
- *If you fail, go to **274**.*

(263)

265

You surge forward, strike, and land a devastating blow. You put all your strength behind it. A jarring impact shoots up your arm. You definitely made contact.

*If **Last Resort** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you must go to **267**.*
*Or if **Blunt Force Trauma** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you must go to **268**.*
*Or if **Knife to a Gunfight** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you must go to **271**.*
*Or if **Overkill** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you must go to **273**.*
*Go to **270**.*

(264)

266

A sense of déjà vu washes over you. This campsite… It's the same one. You hear a rustling from inside the tent. Your noisy arrival clearly woke up whoever is inside. A sing-song voice calls out, "*Hello?*" Your stomach sinks. You recognize that voice. The tent flap unzips, and the same man steps out. He's even wearing the same clothes. He looks towards you, hesitates, then nods. You notice that his eyes show no sign of surprise.

*To respond to the man politely, go to **335**.*
*To respond to the man aggressively, go to **286**.*

(306, 307, 310, 312, 313, 323)

267

Your steak knife sinks deep into the stranger's belly. He lets out a high-pitched whine and stumbles back. He pats frantically at his stomach, leaving great bloody smears across the front of his clothes.

"Murderer!" he cries. *"You've murdered the Child!"*

He collapses backwards against the wall, hissing. You can see his madness plainly in the way he glares. This guy is hurt, but he's not going to stop. You're pretty sure if you shot him, he'd somehow keep coming. The endless, implacable rage burning in his eyes is terrifying to behold.

The stranger starts to fumble at the wall next to him and haul his bleeding body back to the fight. You let the bloody steak knife fall from your clasped fingers. There's no way you are going to give up an opportunity like this. While the stranger is wounded, you spin around and sprint through the open cabin door. His howls of rage grow quieter behind you as you tear off into the woods.

Go to ***298****.*

(261, 265)

268

Your hammer thuds into the stranger's face with a sickening crunch. He twirls like a top and crumples into a heap. You see a spray of blood and teeth, which clatter to the ground just after he does.

The stranger groans. *"Murder…er,"* he mumbles through his shattered jaw. *"You dare to threaten the Child… You… you will pay."*

Before you can respond, he starts to rise unsteadily to his feet. You can see his madness plainly in the way he glares. This guy is hurt, but he's not going to stop. You're pretty sure if you shot him, he'd somehow keep coming. The endless, implacable rage burning in his eyes is terrifying to behold.

You let the hammer drop from your grip. There's no way you are going to give up an opportunity like this. While the stranger is wounded and unsteady, you spin around and sprint through the open cabin door. His howls of rage grow quieter behind you as you tear off into the woods.

Go to ***298****.*

(261, 265)

269

The axe! The one you found by the front door! You brought it inside, thank God. You hurry over to where it rests up against the wall and take the massive weapon in your hands. It's heavy, but as you lift it you feel a certainty that you've leveled the playing field against this lunatic.

You step forward, brandish the weapon, and take up position just in front of the door. A few seconds later, it bursts open and the stranger steps inside. He charges straight at you!

Check/tick ***Overkill*** *on the log sheet.*
Go to ***259****.*

(241)

270

Your fist lands but he doesn't budge. You curse. His jaw was hard. You feel your knuckles bruise.

The man growls. *"You dare to strike the Child? You will be punished!"*

He rushes forward, knocking you to the floor with his immense weight.

Your flashlight skitters out of your hands and slides across the cabin floor, into the kitchen. Without it, you can hardly see a thing.

You scramble for the flashlight, but you feel his hands on you, grabbing you hard. You hear him grunting, sing-song moaning, like some demented elephant or horse.

He is trying to drag you out of the cabin.

To fight back, go to ***282****.*
To succumb, go to ***278****.*

(261, 265)

271

You drive the ornate dagger to its hilt into the center of his chest.

The stranger steps back, stumbles, and falls to the floor. He stares down at the dagger still embedded inside him. Hot blood seeps in rivers down his belly onto the cabin floor. Your mouth hangs open in shock. You're still trying to comprehend what just happened.

"Taken…," the stranger mutters, as if in awe of the dagger. *"Taken… at last."* He smiles at you. *"The Child is free!"*

His smile cracks into a demented laugh. You see unbridled joy shine across his face. Then his tongue, thick and cylindrical, extends out unnaturally from his mouth, stretching to a hideous length. It is a whipping, foul tentacle.

You cry out in terror. A moment later, a second, then a third tentacle, burst forth from the man's ribcage. They are fleshy, warped, and coated with the viscera of their host. They slam into the ground and begin to lift up the still laughing body before you, like some kind of macabre puppet.

All the sounds around you start to morph into the steady whine of static. You are overwhelmed. You turn and sprint out of the cabin, away and into the night.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.
Check/tick ***Arrival*** *on the log sheet.*
Make a ***Sanity*** *roll: if you fail, lose 1D6 Sanity.*
Go to ***298****.*

(261, 265)

272

You try to duck out of the way, but one of the stranger's thick, meaty fists catches you in the jaw.

You feel your teeth loosen, and something at the back of your jaw crack. You tumble sideways. The stranger bellows in celebration. You steady yourself and see him approaching you again, fists flailing.

You realize with a start that during the scuffle, the two of you swapped positions. You are now between him and the door.

There's no way you're staying…

You spin around and sprint away from the cabin, out into the woods. The stranger's howls of fury grow fainter as you vanish into the night.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.
Take 1D4 damage.
Go to ***298****.*

(262)

273

You cry out and swing the axe down, double-handed, from above your head. The heavy, steel end collides with the stranger's skull. It splits his face in two. He goes down suddenly and immediately. The axe is pulled from your grasp. It's lodged solidly inside the stranger's skull.

You watch as, still bleeding from the wound, the stranger's limbs twitch unnaturally. His eyes flutter. Suddenly, he speaks. His voice sounds somehow different.

"They're… coming," he mutters. He coughs and a great spurt of black blood erupts from his mouth. He ignores it. *"You're… not safe…"*

He gurgles and coughs. His eyes flutter open once more and lock with yours. "*I'm sorry…*," he says, then goes completely still. He's dead.

Outside, something stirs in the wind. A howling cry echoes all through the cabin. The windows blow in, spraying glass across the floor. In the distance, you hear the rising howl of static.

The cabin door yawns open like a mouth to the beyond. You stagger towards it as your mind struggles to understand what you've seen. You can't stay here. You must go. Run. Run! RUN!

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.
Make a ***Sanity*** *check; if you fail, lose 1D4 Sanity.*
Go to ***298****.*

(261, 265)

274

Even in an inferior position, the stranger is too fast for you. He whirls about and your attack swings wide. While you're recovering, he snarls, lunges, and drives his fist into your gut. You crumple up and stagger back. All the wind has been immediately knocked out of you.

The stranger bellows in celebration. You steady yourself, then look up to see him approaching you again, fists flailing.

You realize with a start that during the scuffle, the two of you swapped positions. You are now between him and the door.

There's no way you're staying…

You spin around and sprint away from the cabin, out into the woods. The stranger's howls of fury grow fainter as you vanish into the night.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.
Take 1D4 damage.
Go to ***298****.*

(260, 264)

275

You made a lot of noise when you pushed through the trees into the clearing. Something rustles inside the tent. You've clearly woken up whoever is inside.

"Hello?" a timid voice calls out. The tent flap unzips, and an unfamiliar man steps out into the moonlight. He's fully clothed. He looks towards you, hesitates, then nods. You notice that his eyes show no sign of surprise.

To respond to the man politely, go to ***335****.*
To respond to the man aggressively, go to ***286****.*

(306, 307, 310, 312, 313, 323)

276

"It will always be worth it," you say. *"I love you, and I'll always love you."* Alex's face remains impassive. Then, it splits into a warm smile.

"I know you do. I love you, too. I love you more than anything. We all love you." Alex seizes your hand. "*We can have a family here, Charlie."*

You take a step back, but Alex's grip tightens. You can't get away. *"What?"*

"Here, in the forest. We can be together, forever. Loving. Like you say."

"Alex, where have you been all this time? Where did you go?" you ask.

"I've been here," Alex says. *"Waiting for you."*

If ***Arrival*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, a horrible image flashes into your mind, go to* ***250****.*
Go to ***248****.*

(277)

277

You can't let Alex throw everything away. You try pleading with them.

"It is. We have each other. Please, Alex!" Tears stream down your face.

Make a Hard ***Persuade*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***276****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***229****.*

(281)

278

Something inside you gives up. There is a sweet serenity in refusing to struggle. The stranger's hands on you feel like warm tongues, clinging to your body.

You feel yourself drawn up, off the floor. The long, cylindrical tongues are wrapping around you. You're pressed up against the man. You feel the warmth of his breath, the cold of the night, and all the sounds and fears of the forest rushing through your mind. You feel pine needles sprout through your skin like hairs. You feel your mouth and throat and lungs clog with moist, black soil. You feel shoots of grass growing and thriving from the gelatinous whites of your eyes.

You are at peace.

The Child has you.

You can finally rest.

You relinquish your mind and feel a final, blissful moment of peace. It lasts for just a few seconds before the stranger's hands crush your skull, but it echoes for all eternity.

THE END

(232, 252, 270, 291, 326)

279

You dash across the clearing and cling to Alex. *"Oh my God! I've been so worried!"* You hold them close against you.

If ***Broken Heart*** *it checked/ticked on the log sheet, your words ring hollow, you must go to* ***281****.*
Go to ***242****.*

(280)

280

You spin around. There, standing on the edge of the clearing, is Alex. Their clothes are flaked with mud and dirt. There are twigs caught in their hair. But they're here. They're alive. They're smiling at you.

"Honey," they say. "*It's okay."*

To run to Alex with open arms, go to ***279****.*
To hesitate, go to ***10****.*

(341, 350)

281

"Really?" Alex asks.

You look up. You feel tears forming in your eyes. *"What?"*

"I don't think you were worried. I didn't think you still cared." Alex's voice is flat and dull. Their lip is curled in a slight sneer. It doesn't look natural.

"Alex? What're you talking about?"

"You never really thought that coming out here would do anything. You'd already given up."

"That's not true!" you cry, but deep down, you know it is. Alex doesn't answer you directly. They just gesture with one hand at the clearing that surrounds you.

"What do you think is left for us, Charlie? Is it even actually worth it, all this?"

To hesitate, go to ***248****.*

To implore that yes, it is worth it, go to ***277****.*

(279)

282

You struggle and try to break free of the stranger's grip. There's no way you're giving up without a fight. You lash out, kick, shout, and do everything you can to escape.

Make a ***Fighting (Brawl)*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***283****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***284****.*

(232, 252, 270, 291, 326)

283

You thrash and heave. It takes a herculean effort, but eventually you wedge yourself against the stranger and yank your body out of his grip. You scramble out of his reach. He snarls in frustration. *"The Child will have you!"* he bellows. *"You will serve the Child!"*

You steady yourself, then look up to see the stranger approaching you again, fists flailing. You also notice, with a start, that the two of you have managed to swap positions during the scuffle. You are now between him and the door.

There's no way you're staying…

You spin around and sprint away from the cabin, out into the woods. The stranger's howls of fury grow fainter as you vanish into the night.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

Take 1D4 damage.

Go to ***298****.*

(282)

284

You're pinned to the floor. The stranger's weight is immense. He's somehow getting stronger. You can't move. You can hardly breathe. He holds you fast with both his hands. With both his legs. With a second set of hands. With three sets…

No. They're not hands. They're something else, something warm and wet and long. They're tongues. Long fleshy tentacles of writhing muscle. His tongues have you.

You feel yourself drawn up, off the floor. The tongues are wrapping around you. You're pressed up against the man. You feel the warmth of his breath, the cold of the night, and all the sounds and fears of the forest rushing through your mind. You feel pine needles sprout through your skin like hairs. You feel your mouth and throat and lungs clog with moist, black soil. You feel shoots of grass growing and thriving from the gelatinous whites of your eyes.

You scream. It's one last great cry of defiance. Then, the tentacles wrap around your throat, break your neck, and surge through your eye sockets to wrap around your brain. Everything goes black. You fall into the final sleep of oblivion.

THE END.

(282)

285

"Charlie," he says.

You freeze. *"How in the hell do you know my name?"*

"The Child told me. It just wants a family, Charlie. That's what we can give to it. All of us."

"The voice in the static?" you ask. *"It wants a family?"*

"The Child, yes."

You may return to this entry several times. When you do, select an option you have not already chosen:

To ask what the Child is, go to ***337****.*

To ask more about what the Child wants, go to ***338****.*

To ask how the stranger knows all this, go to ***339****.*

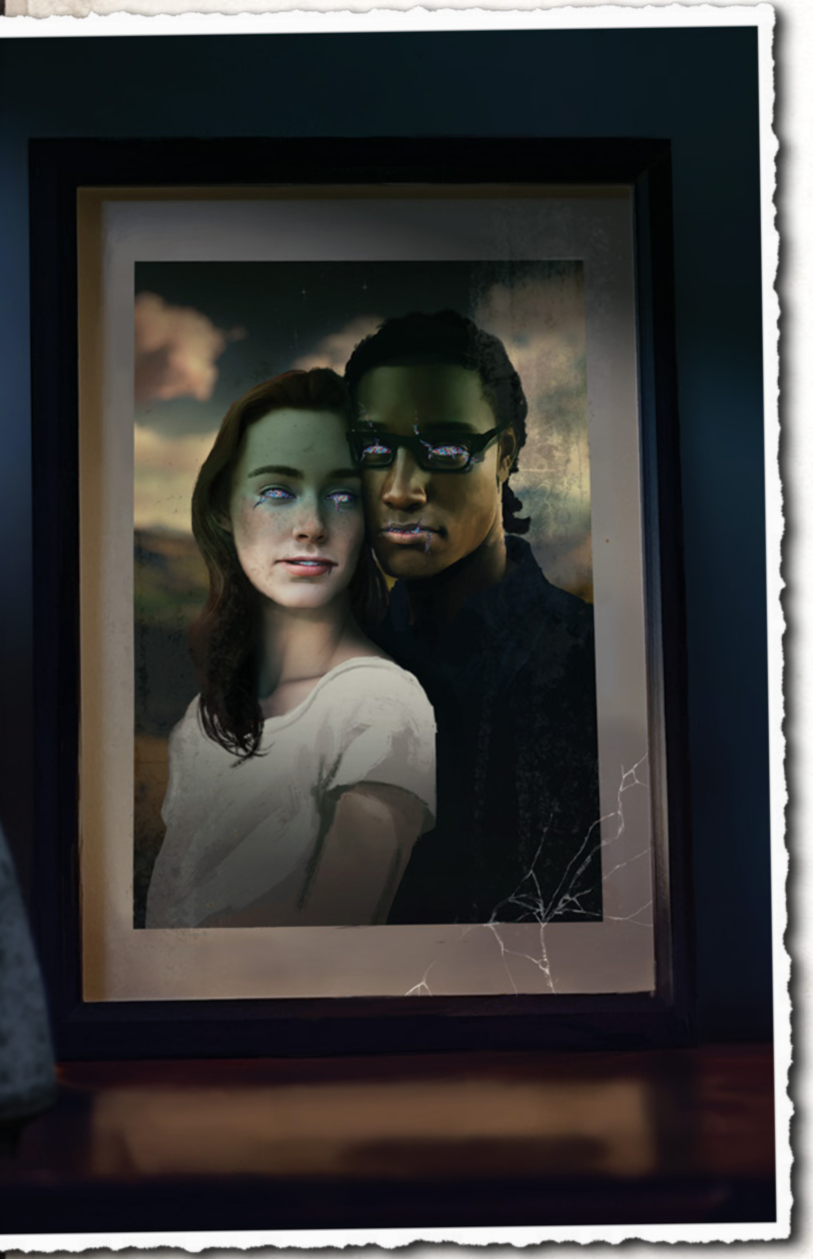
To ask if he is the man you've seen around, go to ***340****.*

When you have finished talking, select one of the following options:

To tell the man he is talking nonsense, go to ***341****.*

To ask him how you can leave safely, go to ***350****.*

(286, 335, 337, 338, 339, 340)



286

"What the hell is going on?!"

"Please calm down," the man says, holding his hands up, defensive. *"Please."*

"Calm? Screw you! Tell me who the hell you are!"

He pauses and licks his lips. *"I'm the one who can hear it."*

"What the hell does that mean?"

"The Child," he says. *"It speaks to me."*

"You better start talking some goddamned sense."

"The Child of the Forest," he says. *"When it weeps, it sounds like static."*

You fall silent.

The man smiles, nodding. *"You've heard it too, haven't you?"*

You hesitate.

If ***Alex*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, Alex has heard the static, go to* ***336****.*

If ***Charlie*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, Charlie has heard the static, go to* ***285****.*

(266, 275)

287

You rush the man while he is still halfway through the window.

Make a ***Fighting (Brawl)*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***288****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***291****.*

(254, 297)

288

You rush over to the window and slam your body into the stranger with all your might. He hurtles backwards and falls out the window into the night. He hits the gravel outside. You hear him groan.

You run. There's no way you're wasting this opportunity. While the stranger is struggling about on the ground outside, you sprint out into the forest and vanish into the dark. You hear his cries of anger echo behind you, but they grow fainter and fainter as you disappear. The dark woods ahead of you are frightening, but they're a far safer option than staying to tangle with that lunatic.

Go to ***298****.*

(287)

289

Paranoia wracks your mind.

You pace up and down the length of the cabin, the beam of the flashlight bounces as you go. You need time to think. Pacing helps. Wait! Stop. What if the battery runs out?

You switch the flashlight off and keep pacing. Wait! No. What if something comes for you and you can't see it?

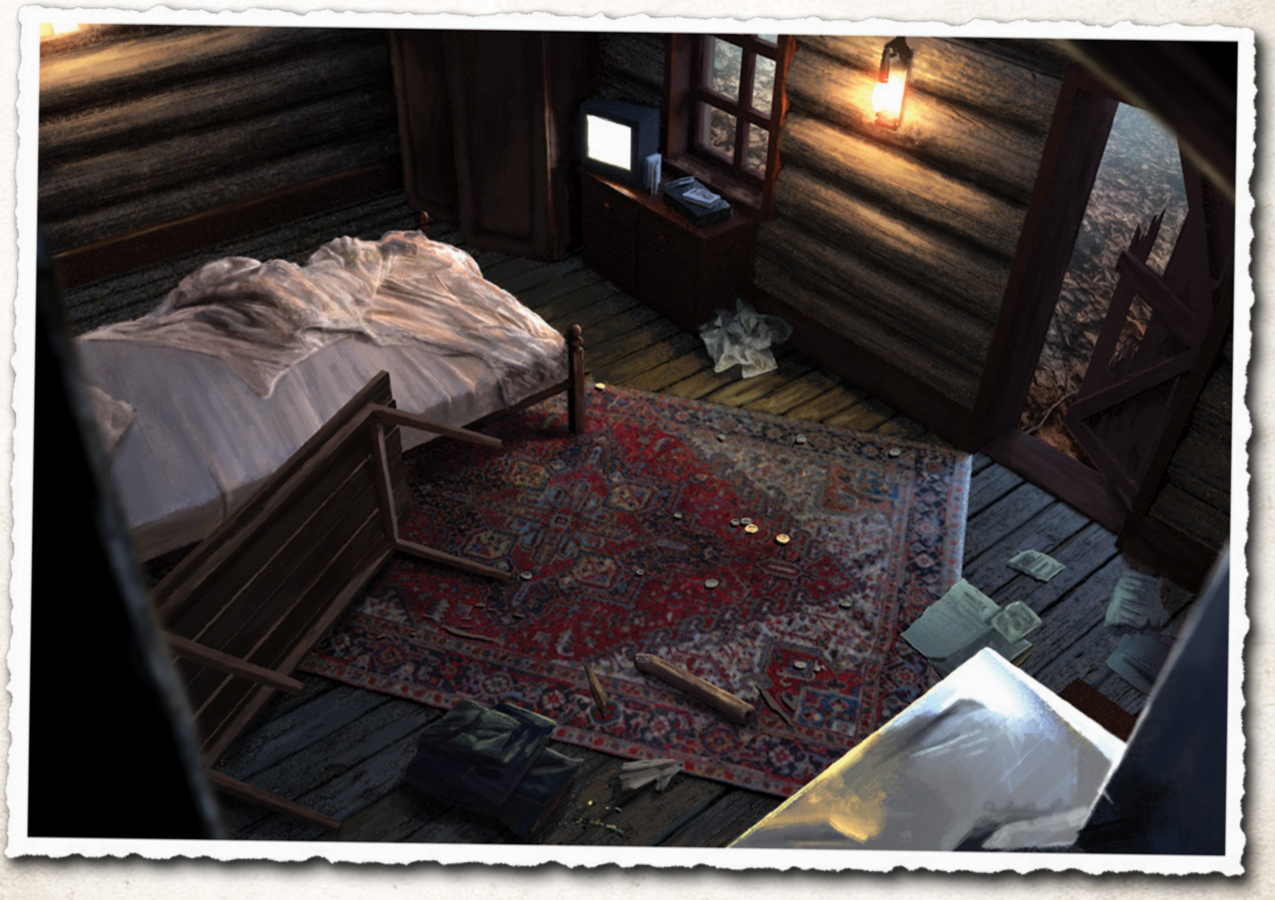
None of what you saw is good. Maybe you should go back to the TV? No. You can't bear to. Maybe you should go to bed? No! What if you're attacked? Maybe you should run. No! What if you get attacked out there?

You stride back and forth muttering to yourself in a higher and higher pitch. Eventually, you can't take it anymore. You just snap. You can't stay in this cabin. You have to get out of here. You stumble for the door and rip it open.

Make a ***POW*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***292****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***290****.*

(203)



290

As you step out into the darkness, a tiny voice in the back of your mind screams at you to stay in the cabin where it's safe. You can't bring yourself to do it. Anywhere out there has got to be better than here. You're basically a sitting duck trapped inside these walls.

You stagger forward and flee out into the night. Within moments, you are lost among the trees.

Go to ***298****.*

(289)

291

You try to shove the stranger out the window, but he catches your arm and tosses you back. It seems easy for him. He's unnaturally strong.

You fall backwards onto the cabin floor. Your flashlight skitters away, painting the bathroom in dancing shadows as its beam spins around and around. Without it, you can hardly see a thing.

You scramble for the light, but you feel the stranger's hands on you, grabbing you hard. You hear him grunting, sing-song moaning, like some demented elephant or horse.

He is trying to drag you out of the cabin.

To fight back, go to ***282.***
To succumb, go to ***278****.*

(287)

292

You push the door open, ready to run. You feel the cool air wash over you. Something about it gives you pause. You take long, slow breaths. You calm the beating of your heart.

Running out into that dark would be suicide. You feel yourself relax. You decide against fleeing. Best to stay here, for now. There's still a chance your partner might return.

It's dark and cold outside. The wind drifts past the clearing in front of the cabin, down the driveway to the road hidden by the forest.

Make a ***Listen*** *roll:*
- *If you succeed, go to* ***225****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***228****.*

(289)

293

You scramble out of the tub. You open the bathroom door and race into the cabin. Behind you, the stranger grunts as he slithers through the window. He's almost inside!

You look up and see the door hanging open before you. There's nobody blocking your way.

To make a run for it, go to ***298****.*
To look around for a weapon to fight the stranger with, go to ***245****.*

(254, 297)

294

You step out of the tub and quietly open the bathroom door.

The cabin looks empty. You sneak forward towards the door.

Make a ***Stealth*** *roll:*
- *If you succeed, go to* ***296****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***295****.*

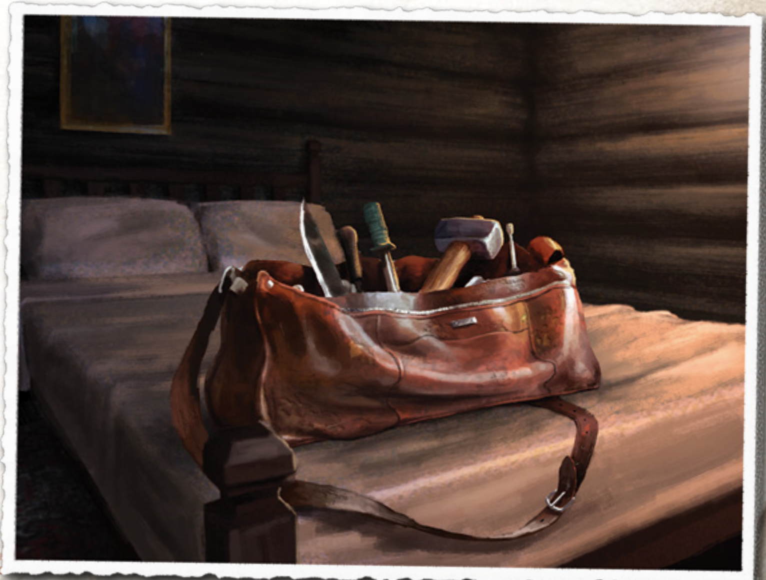
(240)

295

Your foot sets down on a loose floorboard and you hear a loud creak. It echoes loudly. The stranger roars. The noise comes from just outside. Before you can react, he bursts into the room and lunges for you.

To dodge, go to ***262****.*
To attack, go to ***260****.*

(294)



The Satchel

296

You switch the flashlight off but keep it close. You carefully step into the main room of the cabin. You scout out the floorboards cautiously, stepping only on those that won't creak.

Eventually, you make it to the door. You peek outside. You can't see the stranger anywhere. You can see the dark woods that surround the cabin. They don't look safe, but surely they're a whole lot safer than where you are now.

You hover by the door until you hear a faint growl of anger from around the back of the cabin. You seize the chance and race as quickly as you dare toward the tree line. You make it without giving yourself away. Before long, the stranger's cries have grown faint, and you've vanished deep into the woods.

*Go to **298**.*

(294)

297

You wait, huddled in the tub. It's silent for several minutes. Maybe the stranger has gone for good. Maybe he's given up?

Your heart has finally started to calm when you see his face appear at the window again, only this time, he's holding a rock. He hurls it through the bathroom window sending shards of glass cascading through the bathroom. You shield yourself from the glass with one arm.

The stranger snarls as he drags himself through the broken window. Jagged pieces of broken glass cut into his flesh and draw blood. His eyes never leave yours.

*To attack him while he is part-way through the window, go to **287**.*

*To run back to the main room, go to **293**.*

(240)

298

You dash out into the night, running as far and fast as your body can manage. The cold air burns your lungs. The surrounding trees sound alien as they rustle, making you all the more terrified. Every few minutes, you emerge from the trees to a section of dirt road. You keep praying that you'll see your partner's car arriving, but deep in your soul, you know it won't come.

After almost an hour of mad flight, you come to a crossroads. You recognize it from your journey up to the cabin. You're not sure which direction leads to the highway, and which leads deeper into the woods.

The forest feels inescapable.

*Make a **Navigate** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **299**.*
- *If you fail, go to **320**.*

(263, 267, 268, 271, 272, 273, 274, 283, 288, 290, 293, 296)

299

You pick one pathway and follow it. Even after hurrying on for what feels like ages, you can't tell if you made the right call. The flashlight you carry is the only way you can see your surroundings. The only thing you can tell is that the forest is quieter here.

Eventually, you start to tire. You're also getting seriously cold. You lean against a tree and catch your breath.

*If **Well Rested** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, your previous rest bolsters your strength, you must go to **300**.*

*Go to **301**.*

(298)

300

You're thankful that you took some time to sleep earlier—you're rested enough that you don't feel as though you need to stop for too long. You wait for just long enough that your legs stop aching, then get up and continue on your way.

As you walk, you realize that even if you have picked the wrong way, as long as you're headed away from the cabin, it's still good. When the sun rises, you'll be able to reassess and begin to find your way back to civilization. For now, you just need to put distance between yourself and the chaos you escaped from.

*Go to **302**.*

(299, 321, 322)

301

You try to catch your breath, but it doesn't seem to work. Your hand slides down to the base of the tree, and you collapse down against its roots. You suck air over and over. Your lungs feel icy. Despite the horrible situation you find yourself in, your eyelids feel heavy.

You're not sure how long you wait, but it is some time until you feel as though you can get back to your feet. You stand slowly, teeter, but manage to forge on. Right now, you just need to put distance between yourself and the chaos you escaped from. When the sun rises, you'll be able to reassess and begin to find your way back to civilization.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.
Take 1 point of damage.
*Go to **302**.*

(299, 321, 322)

302

Pine needles and dirt crunch under your feet as you walk. You make progress, but with every step you feel yourself growing wearier. You need to find somewhere to rest. Maybe some high ground would be good? Or… should you look for a grotto? Anywhere sheltered would be best, right?

Just as you spot a cluster of trees where it looks like you'll be able to rest and stay dry, you hear a faint hiss from behind you. What was it? Static? Was the sound static? Adrenaline surges through your system.

*To investigate the sound, go to **303**.*
*To run like hell, go to **308**.*

(300, 301)

303

You turn to face the direction the sound came from. You can't hear it anymore. *"Hello?"* you ask the darkness. It does not reply.

You direct your flashlight in front of you. Its light reveals tree trunks, stones, and fallen logs. Nothing unusual.

*If **Running on Empty** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, your flashlight falters, you must go to **304**.*
*Go to **307**.*

(302)

304

Before you can finish scanning the area in front of you, the beam of your flashlight flickers and dims. Oh no. Not now! If this thing fails, you'll be left alone in the dark. You slap the top of the flashlight desperately. The beam solidifies, then falters once more. You swear at the flashlight. It responds by going dead. You're left in the darkness with nothing but waning moonlight to guide you.

A few short seconds after darkness falls, you hear the faint sound of static once more. It's all around you this time, and there's a voice whispering somewhere deep within it. The voice is icy, raspy, and laced with longing. *"Come,"* it says. *"Come here."*

*To do as the voice says, go to **314**.*
*To flee, go to **305**.*

(303)

305

No! No! Run! You turn away from the voice and race into the darkness. You're almost completely blind in the night, but panic keeps you sprinting as fast as you can. Moonlight just barely reveals a jagged pathway littered with sharp rocks and treacherous tree roots. You try your best to avoid them.

*Make a **Luck** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **306**.*
- *If you fail, go to **312**.*

(304, 314)

306

It's only luck that keeps you from tripping and smashing your head open on a rock. You stumble through the trees, hands slapping against their trunks to keep your balance. After a minute or so of mad dash, the voice and the hissing static fade. Just as you're about to stop to catch your breath you suddenly break through the trees and emerge, blinking, into a large moonlit clearing.

Without the pine trees hiding the light, you can see much more clearly here. The clearing you've wandered into isn't very large, but somebody has still set up inside it. You see a small tent next to a dormant firepit. You've found help.

*If **Familiar Face** or **Wrong Turn** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you recognize this campsite, you must go to **266**.*

*Go to **275**.*

(305)

307

Your flashlight flickers. Your heart jumps to your throat. Have the batteries died already? You shake and slap the lens and the beam stabilizes, nice and solid. Phew, lucky you took the time to find new batteries.

You search the area in front of you more carefully. The strong light keeps the shadows at bay, and makes you feel more secure. After a more thorough look, you confirm that there's nothing lurking around you. Still, something tells you it's best not to linger here for too long. You stride onwards, using the flashlight beam to navigate between treacherous tree roots and sharp rocks.

After a few minutes of walking, you spot a small clearing through the trees up ahead. You push towards it, snapping through thick brambles and branches as you go. When you emerge into the clearing, you spot a small tent and a firepit set up in the center. Looks like somebody is camping here. You might have found help…

*If **Familiar Face** or **Wrong Turn** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you recognize this campsite, you must go to **266**.*

*Go to **275**.*

(303)

308

No. No!

You don't stop to think. You take off at a sprint and race into the forest. You resist the urge to call out for help because you know that none is coming. Ahead of you, moonlight just barely reveals a jagged pathway littered with sharp rocks and treacherous tree roots. You try your best to avoid them.

*If **Running on Empty** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, your flashlight falters, you must go to **309**.*

*If **Fully Charged** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, it remains lit, you must go to **323**.*

(302)

309

Your flashlight goes dead. You shout in frustration and try to shake the damn thing to wake it up. It doesn't work. You're almost blind when you hit the uneven ground. With every step, you risk falling and breaking your neck.

*Make a **Luck** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **310**.*
- *If you fail, go to **311**.*

(308)

310

It's only dumb luck that keeps you from tripping and smashing your head open on a rock. You stumble through the trees, hands slapping against their trunks to keep your balance. After a minute or so of mad dash, you stop and strain your ears. You can't hear anything behind you. Good, no sense hanging around though. You keep jogging forward for as long as you can. Just as you're about to stop to catch your breath, you suddenly break through the trees and emerge, blinking, into a large moonlit clearing.

Without the pine trees hiding the light, you can see much more clearly here. The clearing you've wandered into isn't very large, but somebody has still set up inside it. You see a small tent next to a dormant firepit. Maybe you've found help.

*If **Familiar Face** or **Wrong Turn** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you recognize this campsite, you must go to **266**.*

*Go to **275**.*

(309)

311

Your flashlight blinks out just as you reach the uneven ground. You shout in frustration but there's no time to slow down. You rush blindly forward through the woods. For a while, dumb luck keeps you from slipping. Then, the tip of your foot hooks against the lip of some gnarled tree root and you go staggering forward.

Make a ***DEX*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***313****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***312****.*

(309)

312

It's impossible to keep your balance. You tumble forward into darkness. You can't even see the ground you're about to slap into. You just know it's going to hurt.

CRACK!

Your shoulder crunches. It's a hideous sound. You can hear bone and cartilage click then snap. Your momentum carries you forward. You bounce off the ground and go skidding down a ridgeline. Your body scrapes and knocks against dozens of obstacles on the way down. You are at the mercy of gravity for far too long. Finally, you feel yourself hit even ground. You roll a few more times and end up flat on your back, staring at the sky. Your entire body aches, but you can tell the pain has only just started. You're still in shock. The real agony is yet to come.

You force yourself up onto one elbow before your injuries make it too painful to move. You're in the middle of a clearing in the trees. It's small, but in use. Somebody has set up a campsite here. You see a dormant firepit and a small tent off to one side.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

Take 1D4 damage.

If ***Familiar Face*** *or* ***Wrong Turn*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you recognize this campsite, and must go to* ***266****.*

Go to ***275****.*

(305, 311, 319)

Opposite: The Inviting Hand

313

For a terrifying second, you're falling through the air. Then, you slap down one foot, find your balance, and catch ahold of a passing tree trunk to stay standing. The recovery hardly slows you down. You keep running forward right away, putting as much distance as possible between you and the strange danger that's following.

You keep jogging forward for as long as you can. Just as you're about to stop to catch your breath, you suddenly break through the trees and emerge, blinking, into a large moonlit clearing.

Without the pine trees hiding the light, you can see much more clearly here. The clearing you've wandered into isn't very large, but somebody has still set up inside it. You see a small tent next to a dormant firepit. Maybe you've found help.

If ***Familiar Face*** *or* ***Wrong Turn*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you recognize this campsite, and must go to* ***266****.*

Go to ***275****.*

(311, 319)

314

The icy voice isn't far off. You can hear it, just through the trees to your left. You turn towards the sound and peer into the branches. You see nothing. Cautiously, you start to step towards the sound. The ground is uneven and treacherous, but you pick your path carefully. With every step, the rasping call gets louder. It builds and builds, until it fills your mind entirely.

"Give me… your hand…," it says. The static in the voice is harsh.

To give the voice your hand, go to ***315****.*

To refuse, go to ***305****.*

(304)

315

You raise your hand and present it out into the darkness. You notice your fingers are trembling slightly. Before your eyes, the shadows that surround you seem to writhe and contort. A long section of dark night bulges from the rest and wraps around your wrist, like a second, colder, hand. It's bristly. It feels like the tongue of a cat.

"Give it to me…," the voice says. Static drips from the words. You feel the tentacle of darkness wrapped around you tighten. More static, somehow made real, drifts off in floating liquid droplets from the point of contact between you both. They linger in the air and add to the growing cacophony.

"Give it to me!"

*Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it. Make a **Sanity** roll; if you fail, lose 1D6 Sanity.*

- *To do as the voice says, go to **316**.*
- *To refuse, go to **317**.*

(314)

316

There is no point resisting. Not anymore. You've fought so fiercely to come this far. Now, it's time to give up. You've earned your rest.

You relax the muscles in your arm and let the tentacle of living darkness pull you closer. The floating droplets of static wrap around your head and begin to cloud your vision. You feel a sharp pain in your arm as the tentacle punctures your skin. Then, something slides up into your veins. You know, without looking, that it is wriggling, writhing, static. The sensation is accompanied by a presence. A looming awareness of thought and malign intelligence. You feel it pressed to you. Something wild and horrid and older than you can understand. Another tentacle joins the first, then another, until your entire body is surrounded by swirling darkness and twisting static.

The static in your veins reaches your heart. You feel your body buzz. You hum. You're in tune with the swarming static. Knowledge strikes you like a bolt of lightning. You understand it now, how the static moves. How it echoes through the trees, the stones, the soil, and rumbles deep beneath the earth. You are part of it, and it is part of you. It is linking with your flesh and scurrying between your cells. You feel yourself torn to shreds. Each molecule of your body is swallowed up. You are made whole. You are made complete.

You're home.

THE END.

(315)

317

You try to pull back and reject the voice's offer, but you feel a creeping presence push its way into your mind and try to lock around it like a vice. At the same time, the tentacle around your wrist seizes up and starts dragging you forward.

*Make a **POW** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **319**.*
- *If you fail, go to **318**.*

(315)

318

You muster up your strength and try to yank your arm free, but your resolve falters. You can't bring yourself to move with purpose. You feel like you're trapped in molasses. Your thoughts are lethargic. You're overwhelmed. Everything that's happened today is just too much.

Involuntarily, you relax the muscles in your arm and let the tentacle of living darkness pull you closer. The floating droplets of static wrap around your head and begin to cloud your vision. You feel a sharp pain in your arm as the tentacle punctures your skin. Then, something slides up into your veins. You know, without looking, that it is wriggling, writhing, static. The sensation is accompanied by a presence. A looming awareness of thought and malign intelligence. You feel it pressed to you. Something wild and horrid and older than you can understand. Another tentacle joins the first, then another, until your entire body is surrounded by swirling darkness and twisting static. Somewhere deep down, what's left of your consciousness howls in rebellion, but your body and your waking mind are too exhausted to struggle.

The static in your veins reaches your heart. You feel your body buzz. You hum. You're in tune with the swarming static. Knowledge strikes you like a bolt of lightning. You understand everything now. How the static moves, how it echoes through the trees, the stones, the soil, and rumbles deep beneath the earth. You are part of it, and it is part of you. It is linking with your flesh and scurrying between your cells. You feel yourself torn to shreds. Each molecule of your body is swallowed up. You are made whole. You are made complete.

You're home.

THE END.

(317)

319

There's a sickly-sweet voice whispering in your ear. It's telling you to relax. There is no point resisting. Not anymore. You've fought so fiercely to come this far. Now, it's time to give up. You've earned your rest.

The voice sounds so gentle. You want to trust it. But you still have enough strength left to recognize that the voice is lying. It's mimicking your thoughts, but it's saying not what you're thinking, or what you really want. It's a voice from elsewhere, from out there, in the static. You must resist it.

You muster up every bit of remaining strength you have and yank your arm free of the grasping tentacle. Then, you turn and run. You don't stop to think. You just take off at a sprint and race into the forest. You resist the urge to call out for help because you know that none is coming. Ahead of you, moonlight just barely reveals a jagged pathway littered with sharp rocks and treacherous tree roots. You try your best to avoid them.

*Make a **DEX** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **313**.*
- *If you fail, go to **312**.*

(317)

Rings

320

You pick one path and follow it. You race along it for almost an hour. Even after all that time, you're not sure if you've gone the right way. The woods around you are endless. The hills are treacherous. Before long, you lose your bearing. It doesn't matter if you took the right way or wrong way at the crossroads. You get tangled up in your own hurried flight and lose all sense of direction. Everything here is identical. Just great looming black shapes, any of which you feel like could suddenly decide to come to life, loom down, and devour you.

This isn't right. It isn't right!

*Make a **Sanity** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **321**.*
- *If you fail, go to **322**.*

(298)

321

Panic is not going to help you get out of these woods. You force yourself to take a few deep breaths and slow your racing heart. You turn, pick a random direction, and start walking determinedly. It's impossible to tell if you made the right call. Your flashlight is the only way to see your surroundings. The only thing you can tell is that the forest is quieter here.

Time passes. Eventually, you start to tire. You're also getting seriously cold. You lean against a tree and catch your breath.

*If **Well Rested** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, your previous rest bolsters your strength, you must go to **300**.*

*Go to **301**.*

(320)

322

You scurry in one direction, then the other, desperately trying to find some kind of landmark you can use to orientate yourself. You find none. Panic threatens to overwhelm you. The fear only makes you search faster.

Aimless or not, your wandering exhausts you. You're also beginning to get seriously cold. Before long, you need to take a moment. You lean against a tree and catch your breath.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

Lose 1D4 Sanity.

*If **Well Rested** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, your previous rest bolsters your strength, you must go to **300**.*

*Go to **301**.*

(320)

323

Without light to guide your path, you'd almost certainly break your neck running over the uneven ground ahead. You silently thank your lucky stars that you stopped to add extra batteries to your flashlight. You dodge between the hazards and leave the sound of static behind you. After a minute or so of mad dashing, you can hear nothing but the rustling of forest pines. Just as you're about to stop to catch your breath you suddenly break through the trees and emerge, blinking, into a large moonlit clearing.

Without the pine trees hiding the light, you can see much more clearly here. The clearing you've wandered into isn't very large, but somebody has still set up inside it. You see a small tent next to a dormant firepit. Maybe you've found help.

*If **Familiar Face** or **Wrong Turn** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you recognize this campsite, you must go to **266**.*

*If **Broken Heart** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you may choose to find safety without your partner, go to **366**.*

*Otherwise, go to **275**.*

(308)

324

A strange tingling fills your body. For a moment, you feel free and weightless. Then your consciousness retreats. You go limp. You are left alone in the woods, unprotected. There is only silence.

Soon, it will find you. It will not be merciful. Perhaps you will feel a moment's pain…

Then, you will die, and you will feel nothing.

THE END.

325

Pain shoots through your body. Darkness threatens to overwhelm your vision.

*You have acquired a major wound by losing more than half your hit points in a single turn. Make a **CON** roll:*

- *If you succeed, return to your previous entry and make a choice as normal. From now on, whenever you take any damage, you must return to this passage and repeat your CON roll.*
- *If you fail the roll, this time, or any future time, you must go to* **324**.

326

The man opens the cabin door. You hear his footsteps running at you in the dark.

You scramble to get your footing, but you feel his heavy hands on you, grabbing hard. You hear him grunting, sing-song moaning, like an elephant or a horse.

He is trying to drag you out of the cabin.

*To fight back, go to **282**.*

*To succumb, go to **278**.*

(231)

327

The cabin isn't very big. Your brother Mark, who owns the place, really exaggerated how luxurious it was. There's only one main room, with a double bed, a chest of drawers, and a corner set up to serve as a kitchen. There's no microwave; both the oven and stove use gas. You see two doors: one leading to the rear of the cabin while another leads to a tiny bathroom. You just know it's going to be freezing in there.

On the wall opposite the bed is a TV and VCR unit sitting on top of a cupboard. The whole cabin is lit by muted yellow bulbs. It's not dark but it's not quite light either.

The sight of the bathroom reminds you that you've just spent several hours driving. You excuse yourself and dart inside. While you're washing your hands, you catch sight of yourself in the mirror. There are bags under your eyes. You stop and sigh. A weekend getaway… Is this really going to solve all your and Alex's problems?

To feel confident about the weekend, go to ***124****.*
To doubt this vacation will fix your relationship, go to ***126****.*

(106, 111)

328

This world is too much for your fragile, mortal, mind. The deep and twisted reality of what lies beyond the wall of human understanding fractures your consciousness like splintering glass.

You are indefinitely insane. From now on, whenever you lose Sanity, you must go to ***329****.*
Return to the entry you noted when you last lost Sanity.

329

You've seen too much. Your brain short circuits. You blink and try to comprehend what you've just seen. You desperately hope that you will be unable to…

You have triggered a bout of madness. Make an ***INT*** *roll:*

- If you fail, return to your previous entry.
- If you succeed, roll 1D4 and go to the respective entry as marked below:

If you roll 1, go to ***330****.*
If you roll 2, go to ***331****.*
If you roll 3, go to ***332****.*
If you roll 4, go to ***333****.*

—If you roll an entry that you have already visited, ignore the result. Select any remaining option that you have not already visited. If you have visited all four options, go to **334**.

330

Jittering, creeping, crawling. The wild is all around you. There are filthy microbes squirming in the soil and horrid nasty monsters lurking in the shadows. It's a connected hive of leeching parasites. An unassailable swarm of horrid insects, that all want to burrow into your skin. You can already feel some of them in there…

You do not trust your own body. From now on, make all ***Fighting (Brawl)*** *rolls with one penalty die.*
Return to the entry you noted when you last lost Sanity.

(329)

331

There are blurry shapes wriggling at the edges of your vision. Wispy, horrid shapes that move like ghosts. They are creatures of the forest. They are lurking, laughing, calling out to you.

You shut your eyes tight. They're not real. Ignore them.

Your eyes deceive you. From now on, make all ***Spot Hidden*** *rolls with one penalty die.*
Return to the entry you noted when you last lost Sanity.

(329)

332

You're seeing faces where there aren't any. In wood grain, in the sky, and in dancing shadow. Some are familiar, some are not, some are wholly alien. You can trust none of them. Every face in these hills is wicked. You are certain some twisted dryad of a forgotten age lurks inches beneath their flesh.

Humanity wears on you. From now on, make all ***Persuade*** *and* ***Intimidate*** *rolls with one penalty die.*
Return to the entry you noted when you last lost Sanity.

(329)

333

Something is talking to you. There's a voice at the very edge of your hearing. You cannot get it to stop whispering. Its words are laced with static. They promise you wonders and play on your every fear. Whenever you try to understand exactly what's being said, the voice vanishes, but never for long. You know it will return.

Lies cloud your senses. From now on, make all ***Listen*** *rolls with one penalty die.*
Return to the entry you noted when you last lost Sanity.

(329)

334

"Mine…"

Your vision switches off. It is replaced with crawling static.

"Mine…"

Your body goes limp. You can't feel the ground. You can't feel anything. You fall through the endless void.

"Mine!"

Your hearing clicks over to a shrieking everlasting crescendo. The sound seeps into your brain. It overwhelms every fabric of your being.

"MINE!"

Your body is gone. Your every sense has vanished. Somehow, you still hear her call. It reverberates in your soul. It shakes your being to the core. It shakes so hard it breaks you open. You fall apart into a trillion tiny little pieces. They are swept up at once. They become one with the static. You become one with the static.

There is nothing left.

Nothing at all.

THE END.

(329)

335

"Hello?" you call out. You struggle to keep terror, or anger, from creeping into your voice. The man approaches you. He's smiling.

"Don't worry," the man says, and holds his hands up, empty palms turned towards you. *"It's okay. I'm your friend."* His voice is small and falls eerily. His eyes are wide with excitement. You look around, but there's nothing in the clearing that gives you any new insight into what's going on.

"What's happening?" you ask. You don't expect a real answer, but to your surprise, you get one.

"I'm someone who can hear it," the man says, then lowers his hands.

"Hear what?"

"The Child."

"What?"

"The Child of the Forest. You've heard it, too. I know you have. When it weeps, it sounds like—"

"Static…," you say.

The man smiles. *"Yes. I knew it. You have heard it."*

You hesitate.

If ***Alex*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, Alex has indeed heard the static, go to* ***336****.*

If ***Charlie*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, Charlie has indeed heard the static, go to* ***285****.*

(266, 275)

336

"Alex," he says.

You freeze. *"How do you know who I am?"*

"The Child told me. It just wants a family, Alex. That's what we can give to it."

"That voice in the static?" you ask.

"The Child, yes."

You may return to this entry several times. When you do, select an option you have not already chosen:

To ask what the Child is, go to ***337****.*

To ask more about what the Child wants, go to ***338****.*

To ask how the stranger knows all this, go to ***339****.*

To ask if he is the man you've seen around, go to ***340****.*

When you have finished talking, select one of the following options:

To tell the man he is talking nonsense, go to ***341****.*

To ask him how you can leave safely, go to ***350****.*

(286, 335, 337, 338, 339, 340)

337

"You keep calling it a child," you say. *"What actually is it?"*

The man smiles. *"Something ancient. I know, a strange name for one so old. I believe it was birthed from Mother Earth herself. It exists alone, in the wild places of the world. It's lonely, and aching."*

If ***Alex*** *is checked/ticked, go back to* ***336****.*

If ***Charlie*** *is checked/ticked, go back to* ***285****.*

(336, 285)

338

"The Child…," you say. *"It wants a family?"*

The man nods. *"It's spent uncountable years alone. It sees past, present, and future. It has tried so desperately to adapt to the technology of our world but has failed. It just wants people to be with it. Here. In its home."* He gestures around.

If ***Alex*** *is checked/ticked, go back to* ***336****.*

If ***Charlie*** *is checked/ticked, go back to* ***285****.*

(285, 336)

339

"It is a burden, this knowledge." The man smiles. *"I came to this place years ago. I brought my camera. I wanted to document the wild, but I found something far more important to document. Something beyond comprehension. I found that the Child could somehow manipulate the magnetic particles in my video tapes to show me visions of the future."* He smiles wide. *"And so far, they have all come to pass. The Child exists beneath the earth, in the soil, in the trees, and in the pine needles at our feet. The power of the earth all around it lets it smell and taste and touch anyone who encounters it—whether they have already or not."*

"What do you mean?" you ask. *"It sees the future?"*

"For the Child, there is only now, and now is everything all at once. It's why it was waiting for you," he says. *"In my time here, the Child has shown me many things, all stored in my tapes. I've kept them and labeled them and tried to categorize them as best I could."*

*If **Alex** is checked/ticked, go back to **336**.*
*If **Charlie** is checked/ticked, go back to **285**.*

(285, 336)

340

"You… are you the guy I've seen around?"

He pauses, thinking. *"It may have been me. Or rather, a version of me."*

"What?"

"I've given myself to The Child," he says. *"I'm in its family now. If it wishes, the Child can take my form. Indeed, the Child takes many forms. Those of its victims, past… and future."*

*If **Alex** is checked/ticked, go back to **336**.*
*If **Charlie** is checked/ticked, go back to **285**.*

(285, 336)

341

You shake your head. *"This… this is nonsense."*

"Trust me!" he pleads. *"I was doubting at first as well, but the Child showed me I could have so much more."* He steps toward you. You step back.

"I need to leave," you say.

"Wait!" a voice cries from behind you.

*If **Alex** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you recognize Charlie's voice, go to **342**.*
*If **Charlie** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you recognize Alex's voice, go to **280**.*

(285, 336)

342

You spin away from the man. There, standing on the edge of the clearing, is Charlie. Their clothes are flaked with mud and dirt, and there are twigs caught in their hair. But they're here. They're alive. They're smiling at you.

"Honey," they say. *"It's okay."*

*To run to Charlie with open arms, go to **343**.*
*To hesitate, go to **351**.*

(341, 350)

343

You dash across the clearing and cling to Charlie. *"Oh my god! I've been so worried!"* You hold them close against you.

*If **Broken Heart** it checked/ticked on the log sheet, your words ring hollow, you must go to **344**.*
*Go to **352**.*

(342, 351)

344

"Really?" Charlie asks.

You look up. You feel tears forming in your eyes. *"What?"*

"I don't think you were worried. I didn't think you still cared." Charlie's voice is flat and dull. Their lip is curled in a slight sneer. It doesn't look natural.

"Charlie? What're you talking about?"

"You never really thought that coming out here would do anything. You'd already given up."

"That's not true!" you cry, but deep down, you know it is. Charlie doesn't answer you directly. They just gesture with one hand at the clearing that surrounds you.

"What do you think is left for us, Alex? Is it even actually worth it, all this?"

To hesitate, go to ***348****.*

To implore that yes, it is worth it, go to ***345****.*

(343)

345

You can't let Charlie throw everything away. You try pleading with them.

"It is. We have each other. Please, Charlie!" Tears stream down your face.

Make a Hard ***Persuade*** *roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to* ***346****.*
- *If you fail, go to* ***349****.*

(344)

346

"It will always be worth it," you say. *"I love you, and I'll always love you."* Charlie's face remains impassive. Then, it splits into a warm smile.

"I know you do. I love you, too. I love you more than anything. We all love you." Charlie seizes your hand. *"We can have a family here, Alex."*

You take a step back, but Charlie's grip tightens. You can't get away. *"What?"*

"Here, in the forest. We can be together, forever. Loving. Like you say."

"Charlie, where have you been all this time? Where did you go?" you ask.

"I've been here," Charlie says. *"Waiting for you."*

If ***Arrival*** *is checked/ticked on the log sheet, a horrible image flashes into your mind, go to* ***347****.*

Go to ***348****.*

(345)

347

A memory of flesh splitting, giving way to monstrous black tentacles, leaps into your mind. You've already seen the Child. You know what's coming next. Before you, Charlie's face bulges. Pine needles sprout from their cheeks and emerge, covered in blood. Their mouth opens and a thick fleshy tentacle laced with pale blue veins and coated in saliva unfurls.

You hear Charlie's voice screaming. *"The Child is given form! From its flesh, a true manifestation!"* A dozen more voices join the noise. They're laughing, shrieking, and crying. They're chanting something, a name, they repeat it again and again. *"Ush-Tik-a! Ush-Tik-a!"*

Charlie steps closer, clothing sloughs away from their body as their chest spills open into a sphincter-like maw, from which echoes a horrid swarming hail of static.

To run, go to ***358****.*

To fight, go to ***355****.*

(346, 349, 352)

348

You can't bring yourself to answer. Your mouth just opens and shuts, like a fish's. Charlie watches you for a long time, then bows their head. Your heart drops.

"I need you, Alex," Charlie's voice says, but this time, it comes from behind you. You spin around and see that the man who crawled out of the tent, body unchanged, is now wearing Charlie's face. There's two of them now. They're on either side of you.

"I need you like I needed Charlie," they say, and when they speak, their voices merge, overlay, and bleed static. *"You're here now. We can be together, we three. We four. All of us. Please, come with me."*

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it.

Make a ***Sanity*** *roll; if you fail, lose 1D6 Sanity.*

To agree, go to ***353****.*

To refuse, go to ***357****.*

(344, 346, 349, 352)

349

"It has to be worth it," you say. *"Please. Please Charlie! It has to be."* Charlie's face remains impassive. Then, they shake their head.

"I don't believe you, Alex," Charlie says. *"But don't worry. You don't need to trust me yet. You will eventually. Let me show you."*

*If **Arrival** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, a horrible image flashes into your mind, go to **347**.*

*Go to **348**.*

(345)

350

"How can I get out of here?"

The man furrows his brow. *"You mean leave?"*

"Yes," you say. *"I want to get out of here and go home. I never want to come back here. Ever."*

The man shakes his head. *"I'm afraid it's too late for any of that. The Child has chosen you. It awaited your arrival for so long."*

You shake your head. *"I don't care! I'm not staying."* You turn and make to run, just as a familiar voice rings out.

"Wait!"

*If **Alex** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you recognize Charlie's voice, go to **342**.*

*If **Charlie** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, you recognize Alex' s voice, go to **280**.*

(285, 336)

351

Something in the base of your consciousness is sounding a terrible alarm, but another equally strong part is telling you to run over and embrace the person that you love.

*If **Broken Heart** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, the voice telling you to stay isn't loud enough, to flee the clearing, go to **10**.*

*To run to Charlie, go to **343**.*

(342)

352

Charlie hugs you back. *"I know you have. Don't worry. Everything is going to be okay now. We're all together now."* You feel Charlie's hands stroking at the back of your head. You pull away. You don't have time for this right now.

"Charlie, where's the car? We must get out of here. We have to go. Now!" Charlie looks back at you sadly and shakes their head.

"No, honey, we can't go. We have to stay here." The way Charlie speaks is all wrong. Standing closer now, you notice a thousand subtle details that don't fit with the person you know. This isn't Charlie.

"I know you're nervous. I'd try to explain everything, but I just don't think there's much point." They raise their arms and open them wide. *"I'll just show you."*

*If **Arrival** is checked/ticked on the log sheet, a horrible image flashes into your mind, go to **347**.*

*Go to **348**.*

(343)

353

"We will be together?"

Charlie nods. *"Of course. We all will be."*

After everything that's happened to you, all the exhausting things, it's relieving to just let somebody else do the thinking for you. You put your misgivings to the side. Somehow, you know you're signing your death warrant, if not something worse, but Charlie being here and speaking to you makes everything feel different. Hell, you did go out to the cabin to reconnect with each other, after all.

"Okay. What do we need to do?" you ask.

"Just be still." Charlie says. They step forward and pull you into a tight hug. Your head fills with their familiar scent. Your heart races at the familiar feel of their arms around you. Then, you feel a sharp, but not quite painful jab against your chest. Another arm, no, not an arm, a thick writhing tentacle, has emerged from Charlie's chest and pushed deep into the center of yours. Another one joins it soon after. You cough, involuntarily, as whatever has pushed into your chest begins to spread throughout your body. Tiny droplets of floating liquid static dribble out the corners of your mouth.

From behind you, there's the sound of voices. First one, then dozens, then hundreds more. Before long, there are an uncountable number, all cheering, all wailing, all crying, and all whispering the same name over and over again. *"Ush-Tik-a! Ush-Tik-a!"*

The voices give way to static. Your vision fades away too. The last thing you see is Charlie's smiling face. An awareness comes over you. It's a whole indescribable feeling. You hear the thoughts of a hundred different people and feel the soil of a thousand different places—places on this planet and on innumerable others scattered across the cosmos. It's a cacophony of endless noise. A perfect contortion of sounds, blended to make one, long venomous drawl.

As static overwhelms your being, you realize that each tiny speck looks like its own private little star. Your final thought is that they look beautiful.

*Go to **354**.*

(248, 348)

354

The darkness lifts. The light of dawn brings you to wake. You don't recall how much time has passed. It might be years later, or could it be years earlier?

Somewhere in the forgotten wild, you stir.

You see the ancient forest around you. The pine needles feel like carpet on the ground. It's all warm and familiar. The wind flutters through the Black Hills to a place where no bears, rabbits, or birds ever tread. Trees shiver in the final moments of summer, and beneath the moist earth… you shift.

Dead branches and fresh soil fall away from you as you emerge. Human again, you rise from the damp earth and breathe.

You blink… and hear the call of your master. The Child awaits you.

You have successfully completed the story and have been reborn to serve the Child. As you will be again and again… for all eternity.

THE END.

(27, 353, 360)

355

Whatever this thing is, it isn't your partner. You're pretty sure it might have killed them. Even if it means you end up dead, you refuse to let this monster get away unharmed. As the horrific mutation proceeds, you lunge forward and attack, striking wildly with all your might.

*Make a **Fighting (Brawl)** roll:*
*If you succeed, go to **9**.*
*If you fail, go to **356**.*

(250, 347, 357)

356

Whipping tentacles snap out and catch both your wrists before you can land a blow. You struggle against them. A third tentacle rises into the air in front of you. Its tip is sharp. Behind it, your partner's body has all but disintegrated now. Only their face remains. What's left is an amalgamation of indescribable whipping coils of ropy, bark encrusted flesh. You scream at the monster. It's one last final yell of defiance.

The third tentacle shoots forward and plunges into the center of your chest. All the air is driven out of your lungs. Blood pours from the wound. Your vision starts to go gray. You try to struggle and free your hands once more, but there's no strength left in you.

The final image you see before everything turns dark is your partner's face.

They look so disappointed.

THE END.

(355)

357

"No," you say. *"I don't want that."*

"What?"

"I don't care what you or anybody else says about the Child. I want to go home. I want to leave!" You see your partner's face fall.

"I'm sorry, honey. I'm sorry I couldn't make it painless."

Your partner's face bulges. Pine needles sprout from their cheeks and emerge, covered in blood. Their mouth opens and a thick fleshy tentacle laced with pale blue veins and coated in saliva unfurls.

You hear your partner's voice screaming. *"The Child is given form! From its flesh emerges a true manifestation!"* A dozen more voices join the noise. They're laughing, shrieking, and crying. They're chanting something. A name. They repeat it again and again. *"Ush-Tik-a! Ush-Tik-a!"*

Your partner steps closer, clothing sloughs away from their body as their chest spills open into a sphincter-like maw, from which echoes a horrid swarming hail of static.

To run, go to ***358****.*
To fight, go to ***355****.*

(248, 348)

358

You take one last look at your partner's body. It's disintegrating, turning into something foul before your eyes. There is nothing left you can do for them. It doesn't matter how you feel about them, what you wanted for them, some greater force has decided for you. All you can do now, is run.

You race for the edge of the clearing. You can make it out if you're fast enough! You hear the warped sound of your partner's voice calling after you but don't turn to look back. Then, you hear heavy slamming footsteps fast approaching.

Make a **DEX** *roll:*
If you succeed, go to ***360****.*
If you fail, go to ***359****.*

(250, 347, 357)

359

You never make it to the edge of the clearing. Just as you're about to break into the trees you hear a footstep right next to you. You catch sight of a tentacle whipping in your direction. You throw yourself sideways and manage to avoid the blow, but you tumble down and land on your hands and knees. Before you can stand, a catastrophic force slams into your back. Your spine is immediately crushed, and you fall face first onto the ground. You feel two strong tentacles seize around your torso and yank you into the air.

With agonizing slowness, the tentacles turn you around. You see your partner. They are mostly a monster now. Only their face remains. As your vision goes black, the last thing you see is their face.

They look so disappointed.

THE END.

(10, 358)

360

You run through the forest. You jump logs, duck under low-hanging branches, deftly avoid the moss-ridden stones. For a while you hear the sounds of pursuit, but terror, rage, and anguish pushes you to run for far longer than you ever have before. Eventually, the sounds of pursuit fade. You keep running, tears streaming down your face. You run for hours. You only stop when the sun rises.

By the light of the new day, you find your way through the trees back to a main road. You walk, haggard, for hours.

Sometime in the mid afternoon, when the autumn sun is beginning to dip, you are picked up by a passing trucker. He stares at you curiously and asks repeatedly if you are alright. You never answer him. You ask to be dropped in the center of town, but he drops you at the police station. Doesn't matter. It'll do. You head inside.

Days pass in a blur of hospital visits, police reports, and soul sucking interviews with smiling psychologists who assure you they're only there to help. Search teams go into the Black Hills to try and find your partner. They don't find anyone, but you never really thought they would. They do eventually find your car. Even though it has your license plate, the searchers say it can't have been the same vehicle. It was rusted, covered in moss, and looked as though it had been abandoned in the forest for years.

You find no reprieve, even in rest. When you sleep, you dream only of the forest. The lonely trees, the wet soil, and the endless night sky. But there's a strange budding warmth in your belly that makes everything seem fine.

Somewhere out there is screaming. A chanting. The wind that unsettles the trees. The breeze makes the pine needles dance across the forest floor.

Then there's the static… A cacophony of sound running together, blending to create a long, all-encompassing drone. It fills your head, your very being. The static is all.

Then, suddenly, the warmth within your stomach explodes. Your flesh tears, yet there's no pain nor blood. You watch in horror as the gnarled branches of some ancient tree emerge from your stomach. All while twisted roots encircle your bones, crushing and cracking them. You try to scream, but only static emerges.

As the static fills you and everything around you, the last thing you are aware of is the endless sea of stars above you. The cold stars. Then, darkness.

Go to ***354****.*

(10, 358)

361

You turn the dagger over in your hands—your muted and twisted reflection blinks up at you from the length of the blade. This distortion makes you look old. You tilt the dagger and the reflection shifts. Now, you look younger than you really are.

You shiver and blink away a sudden dizzy spell. You stash the dagger so you don't have to look at it anymore.

Check/tick ***Temporal Steel*** *on the Log Sheet.*

Go back to ***66****.*

(69)

362

You see your distorted reflection in the dagger's blade. It makes you think about funhouse mirrors, like the ones at a tourist beach town you visited as a kid.

You never liked it there.

Go to ***66****.*

(69)

363

Looking down at the face of what you thought was your loving partner, you watch as the distortion of flesh, tentacle, tooth, and vein erupts from their neck, their jaw—even their eyes. Between the writhing and ever-expanding mutation, you see flashes of their true face, the one you fell in love with.

For a moment, that face is youthful, the next it is old and haggard, and the moment after, it is truly distorted, sprouting more fleshy needles and spewing viscous pockets of purple blood vessels.

You feel the tentacles wrapped tight around your torso. And as your partner—this monster—lifts you from the forest floor, you remember the dagger. The one you found in the abandoned shed. The one that distorted your reflection in a similar way to what is now manifested beneath you.

You draw the blade from your satchel and the steel glints in the half-light of the night.

"*Where… where did you get that?*" cries the man from behind you, but he is far from your thoughts as the tentacle draws you closer to the beast. Closer, closer still.

The words are repeated as you are drawn in: *"Accept the Child and be born anew."*

To attack, go to ***364****.*
To accept, go to ***27****.*

(9)

364

You grip the hilt of the dagger tight in your fist. You raise it high and with a great wail that pierces the dark, you drive the blade squarely into the chest of the horrid creature.

The distortions cease. The thing before you wallows, and its tentacles retract. For a second, your partner's face reforms. They stare at you, lips trembling, eyes fluttering.

When they speak, their voice is laced with crunching static. "*Alone*," they say as thin, black liquid spills from between their teeth and over their lip. "*Always… alone*."

They collapse to the ground. Roots sprout from their flesh, piercing their clothes and digging deep into the earth. Their head lolls back and from their gaping mouth grows the branch of a tree, its bark coated in dripping black water.

You turn about, ready to confront the other man. But he is gone.

You stand alone in the clearing, feeling the wind caress your skin.

Make a note of this entry number, you may need to return to it. Lose 1D4 Sanity.

Go to ***365****.*

(363)

365

You stand in the clearing for hours. Waiting for something, anything to change. But nothing does. Eventually, the sun rises. From somewhere over the horizon, you hear a bird song. The sound jerks you from your stillness.

You turn away from that horrid tree of flesh. You don't go back to the cabin. You just walk and walk until at last you reach the highway. Five cars ignore you until somebody stops to give you a lift. When they ask what you were doing, you just tell them you'd gotten lost and are glad to be making your way home.

Home. That's where you are now. Back in Pierre, in the apartment that once housed a young couple. And no, not all the days were great. "Happily ever after" is for children's stories. You think back to all the times you said, "*I love you.*" Looking back, they feel rehearsed. They were an attempt to make life feel like the third act of a romantic comedy.

But life doesn't end like movies do. You know that. Especially now, as you spend your days sitting in a chair by your window, looking out to the street and the passersby. The cars and the lights of the city flickering on as the sun is swallowed up by the horizon.

Alone but for the sounds of the city, you sit and wait. You know they're not coming back, but still, you can't bring yourself to fully extinguish that final shred of hope. It's hard to fall asleep now. When you close your eyes, you stare into the darkness and hope in vain that they'll come back to you.

You made a mistake. But you know you can make it right. If they'll just come back to you. If they'll just come back.

Life goes on. But you keep the door unlocked.

Although you will never be the same after your experiences in the Black Hills, you have survived your encounter with the static and completed the story.

THE END.

(364)

366

Looking at the clearing—the tent, the campfire, the strange constellations of stars in the void above—you know in your gut nothing good will come of this place. It's an instinct, something primal in your heart that you do not understand but know you must listen to.

You turn your back to the clearing and dash faster through the woods, and as you flee you hear the waxing and waning of waves of static fluttering through the woods, as if the dreaded sound was giving chase.

You think of your partner, of your wounded relationship. And, as you run, you realize just how far in the back of your head any concern is for them. This is a moment, the kind you see in films, where the main character is shown what matters to them most in life, and for you it's not them.

So, you run. You run for hours. You run until your lungs are raw. You run until the sun crests the horizon and paints the morning in the colors of freshly spilled blood.

And then, like bursting forth from the hedge, you emerge from the forest onto the side of the highway.

Go to **367**.

(323)

367

An hour later and you're sitting in the passenger seat of a truck next to a long-haul driver named Lance. You've been quiet since he picked you up and even though you keep noticing him glancing at you, you say nothing.

"*You sure you don't want anythin' to eat?*"

You nod.

"*How long was you out there?*"

You shrug.

"*Ain't there nobody who's lookin' for you?*"

"*No,*" you say, unblinking. "*Nobody is looking for me.*"

"*You're really all alone?*"

Your eyes are fixated on the highway as it peels back and forth, snaking its way through the Black Hills, descending, flanked on both sides by tall pines that block the view around each bend, making the future—even seconds from now—impossible to predict.

"*Yes,*" you tell him. "*I'm all alone.*"

Although you will never be the same after your experiences in the Black Hills, you have survived your encounter with the static and completed the story.

THE END.

(366)

368

You slip your shoes on and step out of the cabin. You trudge through the foliage that skirts the cabin walls as you make your way around the building, looking for the generator.

You find it on the back of the cabin: a big metallic box that was once painted beige, but now faded and chipped. It looks a bit like a cabinet, with a pair of doors at knee-height.

You stoop down and open the doors. Funny, you expected them not to open so easily.

Inside are what look like two tall and thin car batteries, connected with wires to one of those boxes with a needle that jumps up and down measuring whatever it was designed to measure. The needle is currently at zero.

*Make a Hard **Mechanical Repair** roll:*

- *If you succeed, go to **369**.*
- *If you fail, go to **371**.*

(93)

369

You check the wires from the batteries. They're not frayed and are still connected properly to the meter box. The batteries don't look too old. Maybe '88 models. Each should store enough power to run lights alone for a few days. A TV would only reduce that by half.

The only explanation is that they've been run dry, and for some reason, the solar panels on the cabin roof aren't charging them.

You hope your partner is getting the proper help. If the cabin needs new panels, there isn't anything a regular electrician could do.

*Go to **370**.*

(368)

370

With a sigh, you head back inside and slip off your shoes. You close the door behind you. It's nice, in a way, to feel so removed from the world, but still safe and secure in this little room. Like a pocket of the modern day planted in the wilderness.

You just wish you could watch TV.

*To make some food, go to **94**.*

*To search for flashlights and batteries so you have light for when it gets dark, go to **95**.*

(368, 371)

371

You reach in to check the wires running from the big batteries to the little box. One comes loose in your hand. You're unsure if it was already unplugged or if you somehow unplugged it when you checked to see if it was secure.

You grab the box and try to turn it around to see if there are buttons or anything on the back. There aren't, just wires and spider webs. You push the box back in place and brush your hands on your shirt.

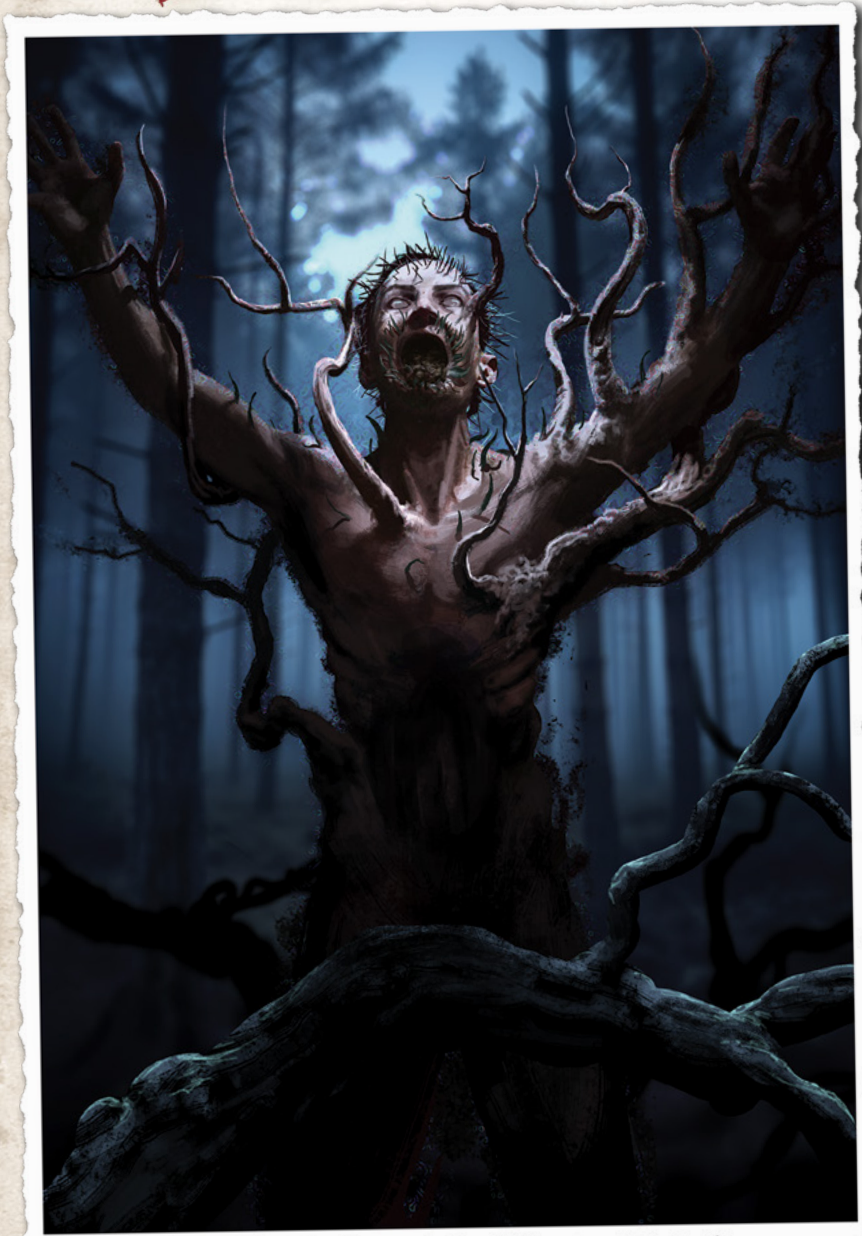
You check a different wire on the battery. You feel a tingle and jerk your hand away. Was that a shock? No. The wire is wrapped in rubber. You're just jittery.

"*Urgh. Forget it.*" You groan, and slap the doors shut.

*Go to **370**.*

(368)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Once you have completed your adventure in the Black Hills, you may wish to draw on elements you discovered during gameplay in regular games of *Call of Cthulhu*.

If you haven't yet completed a playthrough of *Alone Against the Static*, then understand that reading on will spoil several mysteries for you.

On the next page, you'll find a profile for Ush-Tik-A: The Child of the Forest, for your own use and reference.

USH-TIK-A, THE CHILD OF THE FOREST

Waiting in the isolated and lonely wilds of the world, the Child of the Forest lives in the forgotten winds, the unturned earth, and ancient trees, where all other life fears to tread. It aches for purpose and form and desires a violent unending to its own accursed solitude.

Other names: the cursed wind, the devil in the earth.

The being known as Ush-Tik-A—or the Child of the Forest—is an ancient entity said to inhabit the wild places of the world. Born from a mixture of dark rites cast centuries ago over the remnants of a fallen star, Ush-Tik-A is a shapeless, formless hive mind that poisons the regions it inhabits, rendering it free from animal and human life.

Its connection to the ley lines of the earth extends its consciousness through time, allowing it to view its own future, past, and present at once. While it can only take physical form by inhabiting the body of a human host, it can manipulate natural minerals to communicate.

Ush-Tik-A is a lonely entity. It desires the ability to take physical form, but even with a willing host, this never lasts long, as Ush-Tik-A's unfamiliarity with solid shapes inevitably destroy the host in a warping and violent calamity of broken bones and mutated flesh.

Cult

There are few followers of Ush-Tik-A. Usually, disciples are those looking to connect with spirits of the wild. Occasionally, the Child of the Forest answers their search, wearing a guise to gain the trust of potential followers, before then communicating with them about its solitude to garner sympathy.

Members of the cult are generally driven by a desire to assist the being in undoing its loneliness, while more narcissistic followers are motivated by the gift of foresight. Above all else, those who show promise in an ability to procure other sacrifices are generally spared being devoured by Ush-Tik-A in favor of them bringing new sacrifices into the fold.

Encounters

Ush-Tik-A poisons the wild in which it resides, slowly killing all insect and animal life with a disease that causes horrid weeping welts, followed (most of the time) by violent aneurysms as the brain contorts and bleeds to death.

It is possible to reside in Ush-Tik-A's domain for some time before succumbing to the disease, as the entity always prioritizes its desire to consume souls before its desire to kill.

TYPICAL MANIFESTATION OF USH-TIK-A

STR 200	**CON** 400	**SIZ** 250	**DEX** 60	**INT** 80
APP —	**POW** 140	**EDU** —	**SAN** —	**HP** 65*
DB: +5D6	**Build:** 6	**Move:** 7	**MP:** 28	

***Regenerate:** regenerates 3 hit points at start of each round; this regeneration stops if it is reduced to zero hit points.

Combat

Attacks per round: 1D4 (bash) or 1 (stab/lash)
May use its mass up to four times in a round to bash (a Fighting roll) up to four opponents, each dealing 5D6 damage. Alternatively, it may attack once per round using a pseudopod to lash or stab.

Pseudopod: if attack is successful, it deals 2D6 damage and the target is incapacitated (unable to move or fight back) until treated with a successful First Aid or Medicine roll.

Fighting	80% (40/16), damage 1D6
Pseudopod	40% (20/4), damage 2D6 (see above)
Dodge	50% (25/5)

Armor: none; if Ush-Tik-A is reduced to zero hit points it is killed, vanishing into the earth. It will emerge in a new area of wilderness in 1D100 years.
Spells: as the Keeper desires.
Sanity loss: 1/1D6 loss to encounter Ush-Tik-A.

Ush-Tik-A can only take physical form temporarily, and even then, only by possessing a willing (or unwilling) subject who has already had its soul devoured.

Aura

When in Ush-Tik-A's domain, one always becomes acutely aware of the wilderness around them. One's understanding of their own isolation is heightened. The sounds of the wind or trees or running water all become starkly apparent. Within the domain of Ush-Tik-A, the forest is alive and suffocating—the "wilderness" feels like a living and breathing entity.

LOG SHEET

Copy or print out this page for use when playing. The entries on this log sheet reflect choices you've made and events that have transpired during your playthrough of *Alone Against the Static*. Refer to the log sheet to check off/tick or consult entries as instructed. Whenever you begin a playthrough, reset all entries in the log sheet.

○ Alex
○ Arrival
○ Blame Game
○ Blunt Force Trauma
○ Broken Heart
○ Charlie
○ Close to Hand
○ Comfortable
○ Familiar Face
○ Fully Charged
○ In Case of Emergency
○ Knife to a Gunfight
○ Last Resort
○ Lockdown
○ Lumberjack
○ Nyctophobe
○ Occupied
○ Overkill
○ Practical
○ Razor Sharp
○ Red Handed
○ Running on Empty
○ Survivalist
○ Tech Support
○ Temporal Steel
○ The Couple Who Came to the Cabin
○ The Flowers in the Stream
○ The Quiet in the Evening
○ Tinnitus
○ Toolkit
○ Touched by Cold
○ Unsettled
○ Veterinarian
○ Well Fed
○ Well Rested
○ Wrong Turn

DYING & GOING INSANE

Over the course of the scenario, some choices can result in a loss of either **Hit Points** or **Sanity**. Track these values carefully and remember the following:

- If you ever reach zero hit points, you fall unconscious, become defenseless, and will die. Mark down the passage you're in, then*C* go to **324**.
- If you ever lose half or more of your health in a single instance of damage, you receive a major wound. Mark down the passage*C* you're in, then go to **325**.
- If you are ever reduced to **zero Sanity**, you go permanently insane. Mark down the passage you're in, then go to **334**.
- If you ever lose more than one fifth of your total Sanity in a single day, you go indefinitely insane. Mark down the passage*C* you're in, then go to **328**. *Charlie's Sanity begins at 60, which means one-fifth of their total Sanity is 12. Alex's Sanity begins at 50, which means one-fifth of their total Sanity is 10. These values may change throughout the adventure due to lesser Sanity losses.*
- If you ever lose more than **5 Sanity** points in a single instance, you trigger a bout of madness. Mark down the passage you're in,*C* then go to **329**.

It is possible to trigger several of the conditions above all at once. If this occurs, resolve the conflicts in the following order:

- Prioritize resolving damage before Sanity.
- Prioritize reaching zero hit points over resolving a major wound (i.e., go to **324** not **325**).
- Prioritize reaching zero Sanity first, which basically cancels out indefinite insanity and/or a bout of madness (i.e., go to **334** not **328** or **329**).

MODERN ERA INVESTIGATOR

Name Alex

Birthplace Deadwood, SD

Pronoun ______

Occupation Salesperson

Residence Pierre, SD

Age 32

CHARACTERISTICS

	Reg	Half	Fifth
STR	70	35	14
CON	60	30	12
DEX	65	32	13
INT IDEA	55	27	11
SIZ	75	37	15
POW	50	25	10
APP	60	30	12
EDU KNOW	65	32	13

	Maximum / Starting	Current	Insane
Hit Points	13		
Magic Points	10		
Luck			
Sanity	50		10

CALL of CTHULHU™
40th Anniversary
1981 - 2021

Max Sanity ☐ Temporary Insanity ☐ Indefinite Insanity ☐ Major Wound ☐ Unconscious ☐ Dying ☐

SKILLS

Skill	Reg	Half	Fifth
☐ Accounting (05%)	20	10	4
☐ Anthropology (01%)			
☐ Appraise (05%)			
☐ Archaeology (01%)			
☐ ______ (05%) Art / Craft			
☐ ______			
☐ Charm (15%)			
☐ Climb (20%)			
☐ Computer Use (05%)			
Credit Rating (00%)	40	20	8
Cthulhu Mythos (00%)			
☐ Disguise (05%)			
☐ Dodge (half DEX)	32	16	6
☐ Drive Auto (20%)	45	22	9
☐ Elec. Repair (10%)			
☐ Electronics (01%)			
☐ Fast Talk (05%)			
☐ Fighting (Brawl) (25%)	55	27	11
☐ ______ Fighting			

Skill	Reg	Half	Fifth
☐ Firearms (Handgun) (20%)			
☐ Firearms (Rifle/Shotgun) (25%)			
☐ ______ Firearms			
☐ First Aid (30%)	40	20	8
☐ History (05%)			
☐ Intimidate (15%)	60	30	12
☐ Jump (20%)			
☐ ______ (01%) Language (Other)			
☐ ______			
☐ ______			
☐ English (EDU) Language (Own)	65	32	13
☐ Law (05%)			
☐ Library Use (20%)			
☐ Listen (20%)	50	25	10
☐ Locksmith (01%)			
☐ Mech. Repair (10%)			
☐ Medicine (01%)			
☐ Natural World (10%)	30	15	6
☐ Navigate (10%)	40	20	8

Skill	Reg	Half	Fifth
☐ Occult (05%)			
☐ Persuade (10%)	60	30	12
☐ ______ (01%) Pilot			
☐ Psychoanalysis (01%)			
☐ Psychology (10%)	45	22	9
☐ Ride (05%)			
☐ ______ (01%) Science			
☐ ______			
☐ ______			
☐ Sleight of Hand (10%)			
☐ Spot Hidden (25%)	35	17	7
☐ Stealth (20%)	35	17	7
☐ ______ (10%) Survival			
☐ Swim (20%)			
☐ Throw (20%)			
☐ Track (10%)			
☐ ______			
☐ ______			
☐ ______			

COMBAT

Weapon	Skill			Damage	# of Attacks	Range	Ammo	Malf.
Brawl	55	27	11	1D3 + DB	1	-	-	-

Move 7

Build 1

	Reg	Half	Fifth
Dodge	32	16	6

Damage Bonus +1D4

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MY STORY

Alex has been with Charlie for almost five years. Charlie seems less and less happy. Charlie's brother Mark recommended going to his vacation cabin for some time alone. It worked for Mark and his wife Julie. Maybe it will work for Alex and Charlie too...

BACKSTORY

Personal Description
Rugged or scruffy, depending on how charitable you're feeling.

Ideology & Beliefs
I only believe in what I can see.

Significant People
Charlie despite everything...

Meaningful Locations
The restaurant Charlie booked for their first date.

Treasured Possessions
A love letter written by Charlie.

Traits
Hopeless romantic. Fiercely protective.

Injuries & Scars

Phobias & Manias

Arcane Tomes & Spells

Encounters with Strange Entities

GEAR & POSSESSIONS

WEALTH

Spending Level $200
Cash $1600
Assets
$40,000

FELLOW INVESTIGATORS

Char.
Player

Char.
Player

Char.
Player

Char.
Player

Char.
Player

Char.
Player

QUICK REFERENCE RULES

Skill & Characteristic Rolls

Level of Success:	Fumble 100/96+	Fail > skill	Regular ≤ skill	Hard ½ skill	Extreme ⅕ skill	Critical 01

Pushing Rolls: must justify reroll;
cannot push combat or Sanity rolls

Wounds & Healing

First Aid heals 1 HP Medicine heals 1D3 HP
Major Wounds = loss of ≥ ½ max HP in one attack
Reach 0 HP without Major Wound = **Unconscious**
Reach 0 HP with Major Wound = **Dying**
Dying: First Aid = temp. stabilized; then require Medicine
Natural Heal rate (non Major Wound): recover 1 HP per day
Natural Heal rate (Major Wound): weekly healing roll

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MODERN ERA INVESTIGATOR

Name Charlie
Birthplace Pierre, SD
Pronoun ____
Occupation Nurse
Residence Pierre, SD
Age ____

CHARACTERISTICS

	Reg	Half	Fifth		Reg	Half	Fifth
STR	60	30	12	SIZ	65	32	13
CON	70	35	14	POW	60	30	12
DEX	60	30	12	APP	75	37	15
INT IDEA	65	32	13	EDU KNOW	70	35	14

	Maximum	Current
Hit Points	13	
Magic Points	12	

	Starting	Current	Insane
Luck			
Sanity	60		12

CALL of CTHULHU
40th Anniversary
1981 - 2021

Max Sanity ☐ Temporary Insanity ☐ Indefinite Insanity ☐ Major Wound ☐ Unconscious ☐ Dying ☐

SKILLS

	Reg	Half	Fifth
☐ Accounting (05%)			
☐ Anthropology (01%)			
☐ Appraise (05%)			
☐ Archaeology (01%)			
☐ ____ (05%) Art / Craft			
☐ ____			
☐ Charm (15%)			
☐ Climb (20%)			
☐ Computer Use (05%)			
Credit Rating (00%)	30	15	6
Cthulhu Mythos (00%)			
☐ Disguise (05%)			
☐ Dodge (half DEX)	30	15	6
☐ Drive Auto (20%)			
☐ Elec. Repair (10%)			
☐ Electronics (01%)			
☐ Fast Talk (05%)			
☐ Fighting (Brawl) (25%)	55	27	11
☐ ____ Fighting			

	Reg	Half	Fifth
☐ Firearms (Handgun) (20%)			
☐ Firearms (Rifle/Shotgun) (25%)			
☐ ____ Firearms			
☐ First Aid (30%)	70	35	14
☐ History (05%)			
☐ Intimidate (15%)	45	22	9
☐ Jump (20%)			
☐ ____ (01%) Language (Other)			
☐ ____			
☐ ____			
☐ English (EDU) Language (Own)	70	35	14
☐ Law (05%)			
☐ Library Use (20%)			
☐ Listen (20%)	60	30	12
☐ Locksmith (01%)			
☐ Mech. Repair (10%)			
☐ Medicine (01%)			
☐ Natural World (10%)	40	20	8
☐ Navigate (10%)	20	10	4

	Reg	Half	Fifth
☐ Occult (05%)			
☐ Persuade (10%)	50	25	10
☐ ____ (01%) Pilot			
☐ Psychoanalysis (01%)			
☐ Psychology (10%)	60	30	12
☐ Ride (05%)			
☐ Biology (01%) Science	25	12	5
☐ Chemistry	25	12	5
☐ ____			
☐ Sleight of Hand (10%)			
☐ Spot Hidden (25%)	65	32	13
☐ Stealth (20%)	30	15	6
☐ ____ (10%) Survival			
☐ Swim (20%)			
☐ Throw (20%)			
☐ Track (10%)			
☐ ____			
☐ ____			
☐ ____			

COMBAT

Weapon	Skill			Damage	# of Attacks	Range	Ammo	Malf.
Brawl	55	27	11	1D3 + DB	1	-	-	-

Move 7
Build 1

	Reg	Half	Fifth
Dodge	30	15	6

Damage Bonus +1D4

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MY STORY

Charlie has been with Alex for almost five years. Their relationship has begun to feel very strained. Some time alone might help them patch things up, but honestly, it doesn't feel likely...

BACKSTORY

Personal Description

Ideology & Beliefs
Karmic justice.

Significant People
Alex, for better or for worse...

Meaningful Locations
A park bench across from Alex's old apartment where they first kissed.

Treasured Possessions
An inherited family engagement ring.

Traits
Forlorn and whimsical.

Injuries & Scars

Phobias & Manias

Arcane Tomes & Spells

Encounters with Strange Entities

GEAR & POSSESSIONS

WEALTH

Spending Level $200
Cash $1200
Assets
$30000

FELLOW INVESTIGATORS

Char.
Player

Char.
Player

Char.
Player

Char.
Player

Char.
Player

Char.
Player

QUICK REFERENCE RULES

Skill & Characteristic Rolls

Level of Success:	Fumble	Fail	Regular	Hard	Extreme	Critical
	100/96+	> skill	≤ skill	½ skill	⅕ skill	01

Pushing Rolls: must justify reroll;
cannot push combat or Sanity rolls

Wounds & Healing

First Aid heals 1 HP Medicine heals 1D3 HP
Major Wounds = loss of ≥ ½ max HP in one attack
Reach 0 HP without Major Wound = **Unconscious**
Reach 0 HP with Major Wound = **Dying**

Dying: First Aid = temp. stabilized; then require Medicine
Natural Heal rate (non Major Wound): recover 1 HP per day
Natural Heal rate (Major Wound): weekly healing roll

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BRIAN HOLLAND

Brian has worked in various roles with several TTRPG companies, including Modiphius, Paradox Interactive, and Chaosium. In 2018 he received a grant for games writing from the Victorian State Government in Australia.

He spends his spare time studying horror films and writing literary fiction. He lives in Melbourne, Australia with his partner Rachel and their cat that he named after Billy Zane's character from the 1997 cinematic masterpiece, *Titanic*.

NICK GREY

Nick Grey is an illustrator, VFX artist, and game dev from the rainy west of Ireland. If his new daughter isn't depriving him of sleep too much (and she always is), Nick enjoys reading fantasy and sci-fi, playing games of all types, and employing his truly abysmal DIY skills on his new home.

Nick started his creative career with a degree in animation, where he discovered his distaste for drawing the same thing over and over with slight changes, and quickly pivoted to drawing things just the once, but with lots more detail.

After his degree, Nick has been freelancing as an illustrator, alongside compositing and matte painting work in film and television. In recent years, he has been dabbling in game dev as a concept artist and working on his own game, which he looks forward to releasing at some point, ambitiously, in 2050 (game dev is hard).

Drawing from the variety of his work history, Nick employs various skills and styles in his illustrations, from blocking out scenes in 3D, adding textures and effects, to post processing and colour grading, Nick hopes to add a cinematic feel to his work.

A long time RPG player, Nick was delighted to start working with Chaosium in recent years and get the chance to add his own small contributions to the Mythos.

JAMES COQUILLAT

James Coquillat moved into TTRPGs from the video game industry, where he worked on games like *Armello* by League of Geeks and *Ring of Pain* by Twice Different. He studied screenwriting at Melbourne University. After a misspent youth learning to juggle flaming torches, James is happy to finally be in a nice, normal profession like tabletop game design. James is an assistant editor for *Call of Cthulhu*. He's also part of Chaosium's Digital Content team, and lives in Melbourne, Australia.

SUSAN O'BRIEN

Susan O'Brien is Chaosium's line editor for board games and fiction. Her professional background is in editing, publishing, and project management. Susan's projects at Chaosium include the multiple ENNIE award winning games *Khan of Khans* and *Miskatonic University: The Restricted Collection* with German board game design genius Reiner Knizia, Chris Gidlow's The Ruin of Britain novel trilogy about King Arthur, and copyediting and proofreading for the *Call of Cthulhu*, *RuneQuest*, and *Questworlds* roleplaying lines. Her past career included coordinating clinical research trials across the world, working as a jillaroo on a sheep station in the Australian Outback, avoiding being kidnapped in the southern Philippines, and serving as the ghost writer for various Arabian dignitaries.

Born in Western Australia, Susan spent part of her childhood in the United States and lived for a decade in the Middle East as an adult. She returned to Melbourne, Australia some ten years ago where she lives with her husband and their two sons.

NICHOLAS NACARIO

Nick has been involved with Chaosium since he was around 10 years old. His earliest credits for the company include playtesting *Dragon Lords of Melnibone* and the *BRP* 'Big Gold Book'. Nick began working for Chaosium in 2008 when he was offered a shipping and data entry job. In late 2011 he began working on layout for the *Call of Cthulhu* roleplaying game line and has been involved in the production of almost every Chaosium *Call of Cthulhu* publication ever since. His work on the *Call of Cthulhu* 7th Edition Slipcase Set won a Gold Ennie Award in 2017. He has written a *Call of Cthulhu* scenario that was published in *Tales of the Crescent City*, an introduction for *Corporate Cthulhu*, and short fiction for *Ill-Considered Expeditions*, *Destroy All Robots*, and *Down Darker Trails*. Nick is originally from Hayward, CA and now resides in the Pacific Northwest.

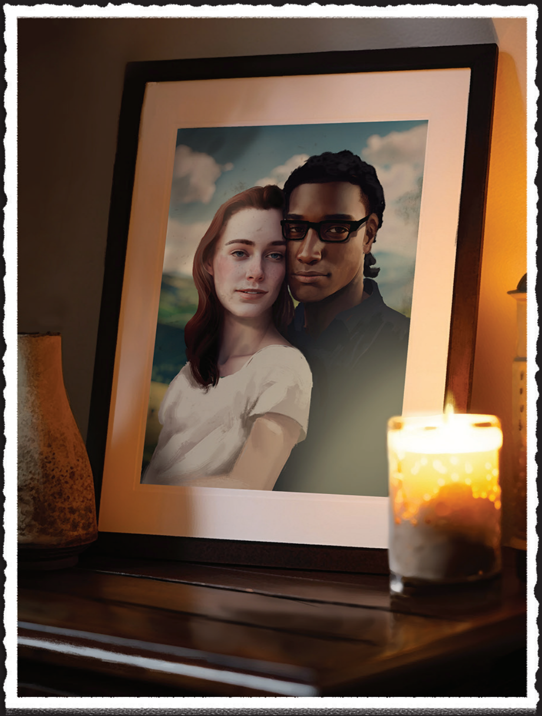
23181-H

CALL OF CTHULHU

Alone Against

THE STATIC

A SOLO 1990s ADVENTURE BEYOND SIGNAL RANGE



Alex & Charlie

Alex and Charlie believe that a secluded weekend getaway in the Dakota Black Hills is just what they need to reinvigorate their marriage—but older and darker things than broken hearts exist in the forgotten places of the world.

Alone Against The Static is a modern-era scenario designed for one player. Choose to play as either Alex or Charlie, and forge your own path through the story—your choices decide their fate!

- A 1990s *Call of Cthulhu* solo adventure—no Keeper required!
- A selection of two different characters to use in the story.
- The brand-new Log Sheet mechanic that tracks the choices you make, secrets you discover, and items you find that can aid (or hinder) your adventure.
- An all-new Cthulhu Mythos entity, detailed for use in your own *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios.

Armed with a pencil, some roleplaying dice, and a copy of the *Call of Cthulhu: Keeper Rulebook* or the *Call of Cthulhu Starter Set*, you are ready to face the secrets of the forgotten wilds.

Will you survive, alone against the static?

Recommended for mature players.

What is Call of Cthulhu?

Call of Cthulhu is Chaosium's roleplaying game of mystery and horror set within the world of the Cthulhu Mythos. Players take on the role of investigators of the strange, arcane, and unknown: regular people making a stand despite the cost to body and soul. Against weird cults, bizarre magic, and otherworldly monsters, only they can save humanity and the world from the terrors from beyond.

CHA23181-H $29.99

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